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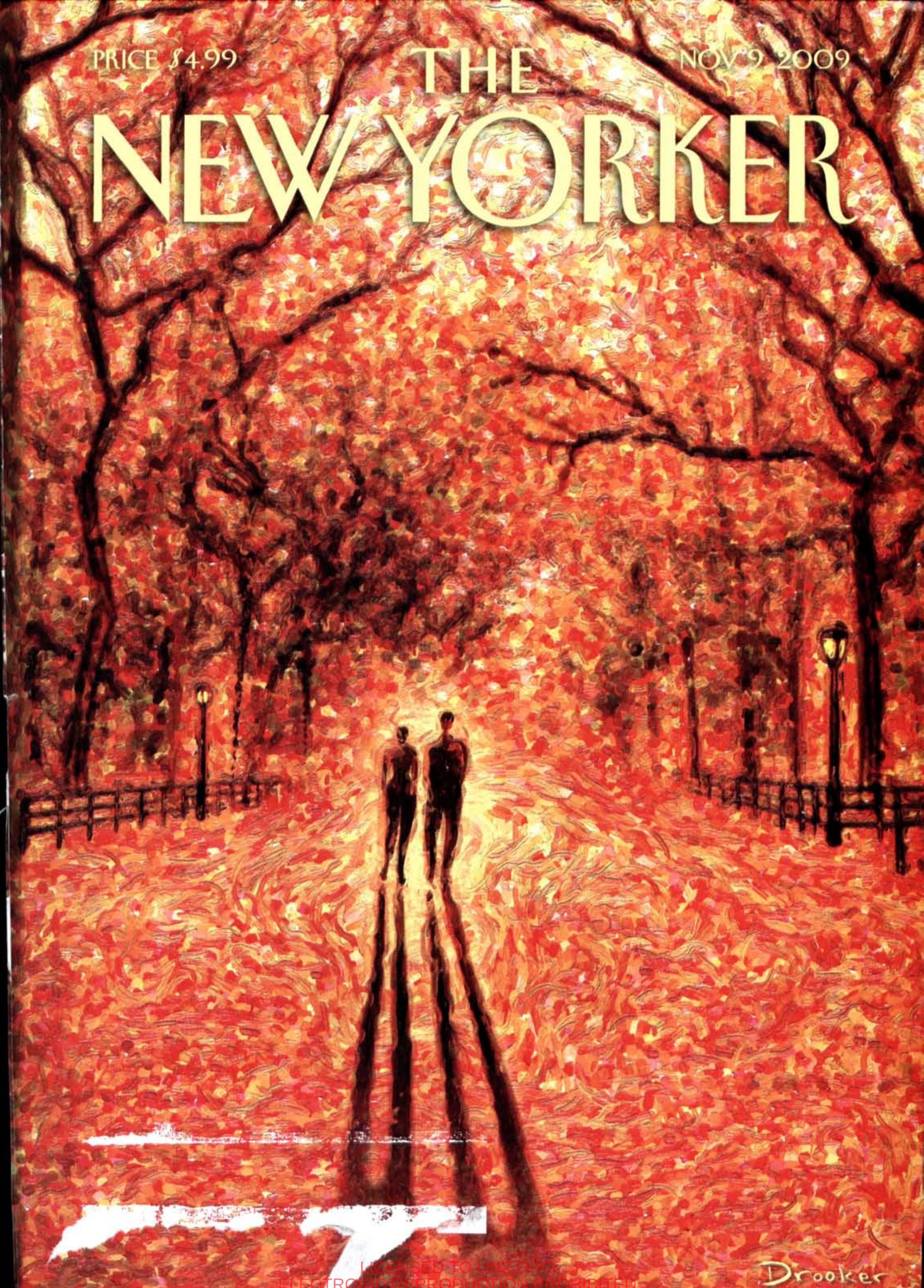
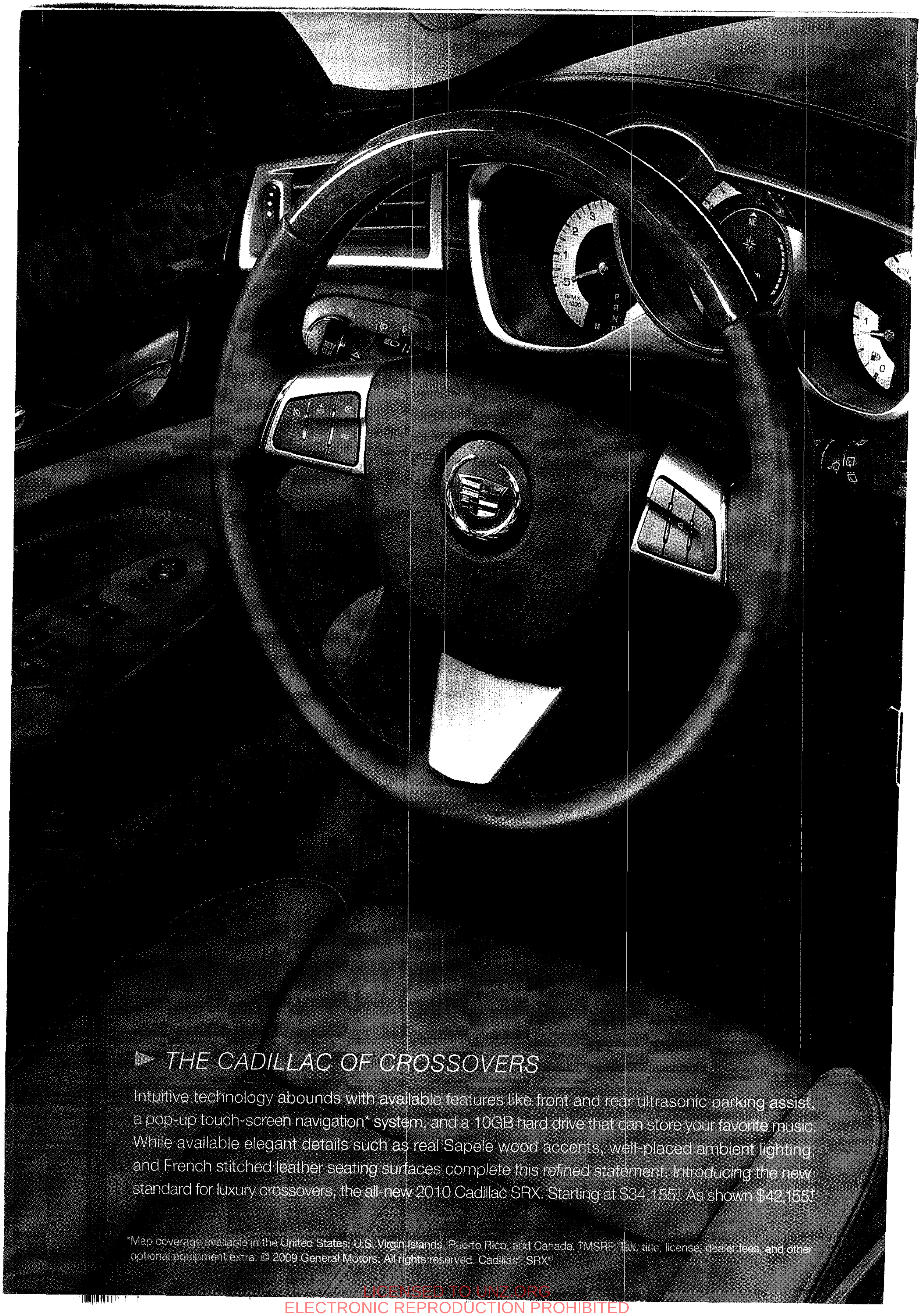
THE NEW YORKER





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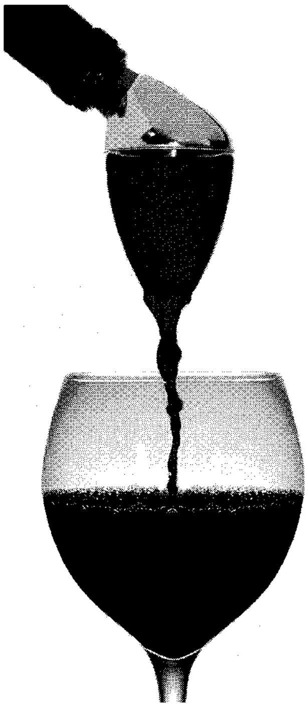

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THE NEW YORKER

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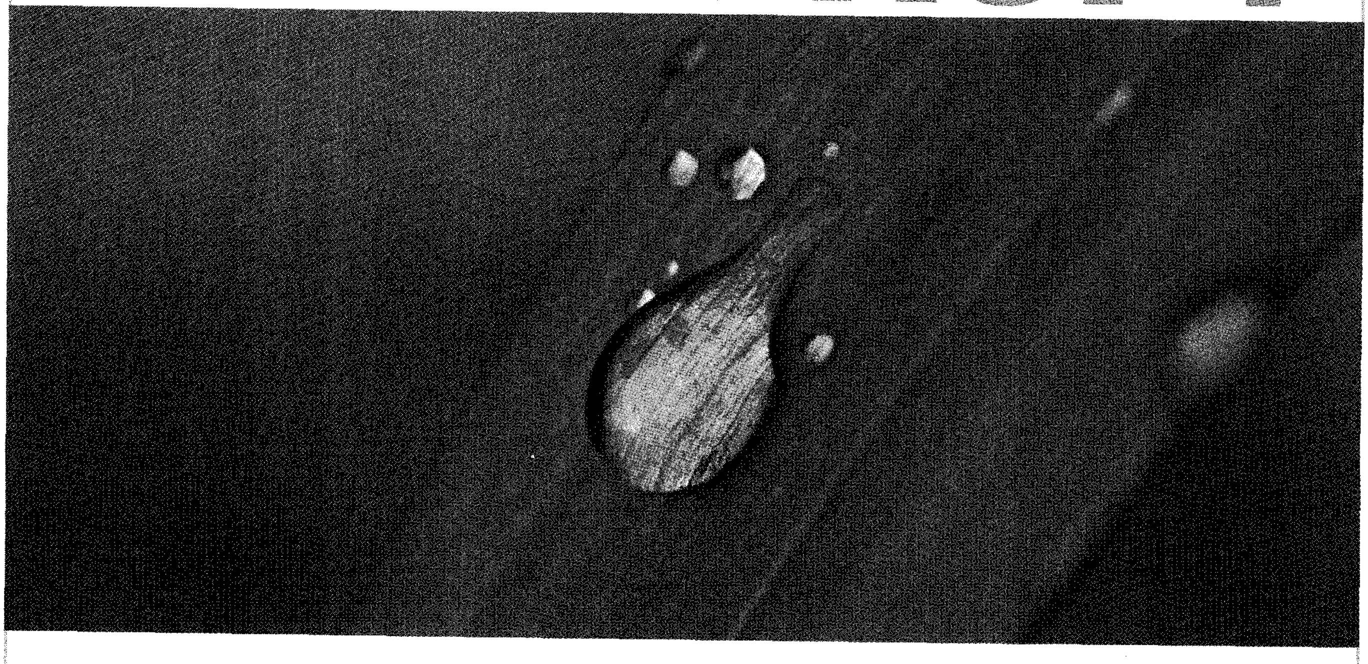

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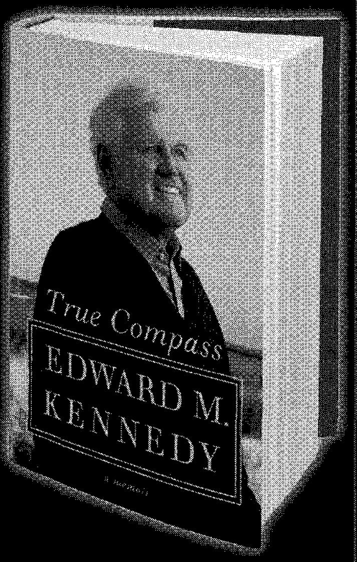

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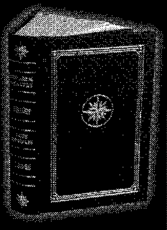

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CONTRIBUTORS

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 27) is a senior editor and staff writer. His book "¡Obámanos!: The Birth of a New Political Era" and his updated version of "One Million" have just been published.

Alec Wilkinson ("Talk This Way," p. 32) has written nine books, including "The Happiest Man in the World," about Poppa Neutrino, and "The Protest Singer," about Pete Seeger.

Dave Cowen (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 39) is an M.F.A. student in screenwriting at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts, in Los Angeles.

Dana Goodyear ("The Scavenger," p. 40) has been writing for the magazine since 2000. She is the author of "Honey and Junk," a book of poems.

Eric Drooker (Cover) conceived and designed the animation for the feature film "Howl," which will be released next year. A new edition of his book "Blood Song: A Silent Ballad" will be published later this month.

Katie Ford (Poem, p. 54) has published two poetry collections, "Deposition" and "Colosseum," and is the recipient of a 2008 Lannan Literary Fellowship.

Lawrence Wright ("Captives," p. 46), a staff writer since 1992, is a Fellow at the Center on Law and Security, at New York University School of Law. His book "The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11" won a 2007 Pulitzer Prize.

Thomas Mallon ("Possessed," p. 62) is a novelist and critic, and the author of "Yours Ever: People and Their Letters," which will be published this month.

Stephen King (Fiction, p. 68) has a new novel, "Under the Dome," coming out on November 10th.

Jill Lepore (A Critic at Large, p. 79), a staff writer, is a professor of history at Harvard.

Glyn Maxwell (Poem, p. 81) is a poet, playwright, and novelist. He has published nine collections of poetry, including "The Sugar Mile" and "Hide Now."

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 84) has been the magazine's music critic since 1996.

Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 86) is a staff writer and a film critic for the magazine.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Hendrik Hertzberg chats live with readers, and talks with *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Political Scene. / The New Yorker Out Loud: *Lawrence Wright* on Gaza. / Video: *Jorge Colombo's* Finger Painting; the DVD of the Week; animated cartoons. / *Dana Goodyear* rounds up favorite Jonathan Gold reviews. / Hear Meredith Monk's music on *Alex Ross's* new blog, Unquiet Thoughts. / More blogs: *Steve Coll* and *Amy Davidson* on foreign policy, *John Cassidy* on economics, *Macy Halford* on books, and more. / The caption contest, the Cartoon Kit, and a complete archive of the magazine, back to 1925.

THE MAIL

KID LIT

Daniel Zalewski offers an excellent overview of the way the current generation of children's picture books presents discipline and parenting (A Critic at Large, October 19th). In reading to my own kids, I have noticed something else: while many contemporary books encourage children to believe that their potential is enormous, and that they can do or be anything they want to be, classic books written for my parents' generation describe characters who break the rules and have adventures, only to find that the world is too big and scary and that they actually prefer life to be circumscribed and tame.

Presvytera Elizabeth Tervo
Oakland, Calif.

The problem with picture books about tantrums, bedtime, and manners is not that they reflect softie, insecure parenting gone mad. Their flaw is more basic: they aren't literature. The reader (toddler, teen, adult) doesn't want a psychological profile, and certainly not one aimed at curing. He wants to be transported to another world, one sprinkled with wonder, excitement, danger, love, hope. Heavy instructional stories fail. Insofar as they satisfy a parental need—I am civilizing my child!—they aren't about the child at all.

Nina Planck
New York City

FOR THE GAME

Malcolm Gladwell draws two cogent parallels between dogfighting and football: that damaging violence is inherent in both sports, and that both fighting dogs and football players are selected for "gameness," the willingness to endure continued pain in the interest of pleasing others ("Offensive Play," October 19th). The second parallel, though inexact, is compelling. The cultural norm of not letting down teammates, coaches, and fans is highly developed and essential to competitive sport, though perhaps not quite as deeply rooted as the selective breeding, over fifteen thousand years, of people-pleasing dogs which dogfighting so barbarously exploits. The key issue is consent. Even though football success often starts at a young age and is subject to family, school, and community pressures, and the economic rewards are potentially huge, football players have the moral and legal capacity to choose between participating or not. But fighting dogs, because of their breeding and conditioning, the restriction of their activity and movement, and their utter lack of other options, are in a completely different category, both morally and legally. Football's popularity and economic success are not the only obstacles to banning it or reducing its violent aspects; there is a moral argument to be made as well.

Robert Stanton
Worcester, Mass.

The University of Texas quarterback Colt McCoy recently said, "You've got just as much of a chance getting hurt riding in a car as you do playing the game of football." His point is that participation in any sport carries risk, but so does participation in life itself. Veterans like Brett Favre and Jeff Zgonina, who has been a lineman in the N.F.L. for nearly seventeen years, are surely aware of the risks they take each time they step on the field, yet they continue to do so. Why? Not just because, as Gladwell concludes, "there is nothing else to be done, not so long as fans stand and cheer." It's because they love the game—the competition, the camaraderie, the glory, the angst of defeat, and the chance to redeem themselves. We all wish more could be done to prevent injuries to football players. But even if the sport were banned there would probably be kids on fields across the country kicking off and tackling each other—just as dogfighting continues on in back woods and alleys.

Shaun Coen
Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

•

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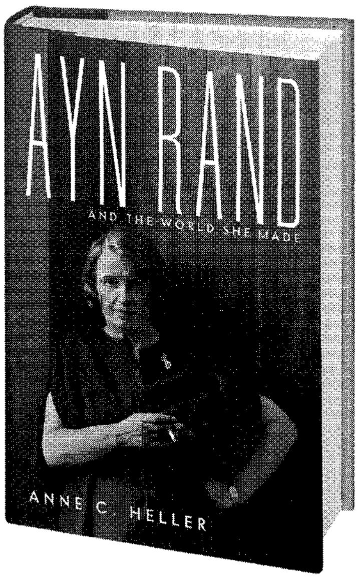

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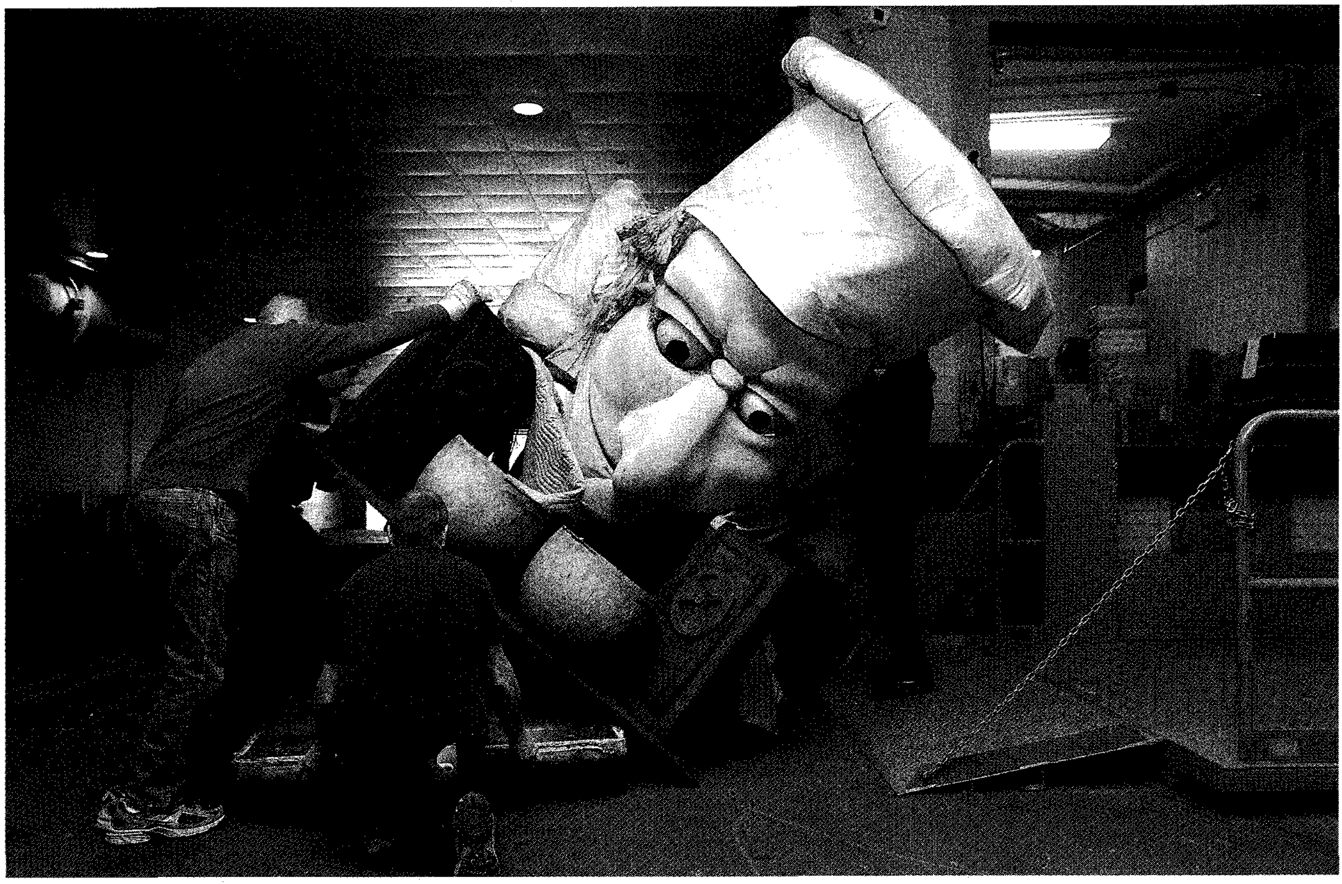

Lincoln Center's fiftieth-anniversary exhibition. Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
VELVET SOUNDS

The "Rebel Waltz" concerts at (Le) Poisson Rouge celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain. Five bands from the former Eastern bloc will perform, including Prague's Psí Vojáci and the Slovak Republic's Bez Ladu a Skladu. (See page 11.)

ART
IN DEEP

The American artist Roni Horn is hard to pin down. She has said, "I always think of everything in terms of drawing," but her thirty-five-year career encompasses sculptures (in materials ranging from cast glass to aluminum), photographs, books, and room-size installations, as well as works on paper. The Whitney plumbs the depths in "Roni Horn aka Roni Horn," a retrospective of some seventy works. (See page 12.)

DANCE
US VS. THEM

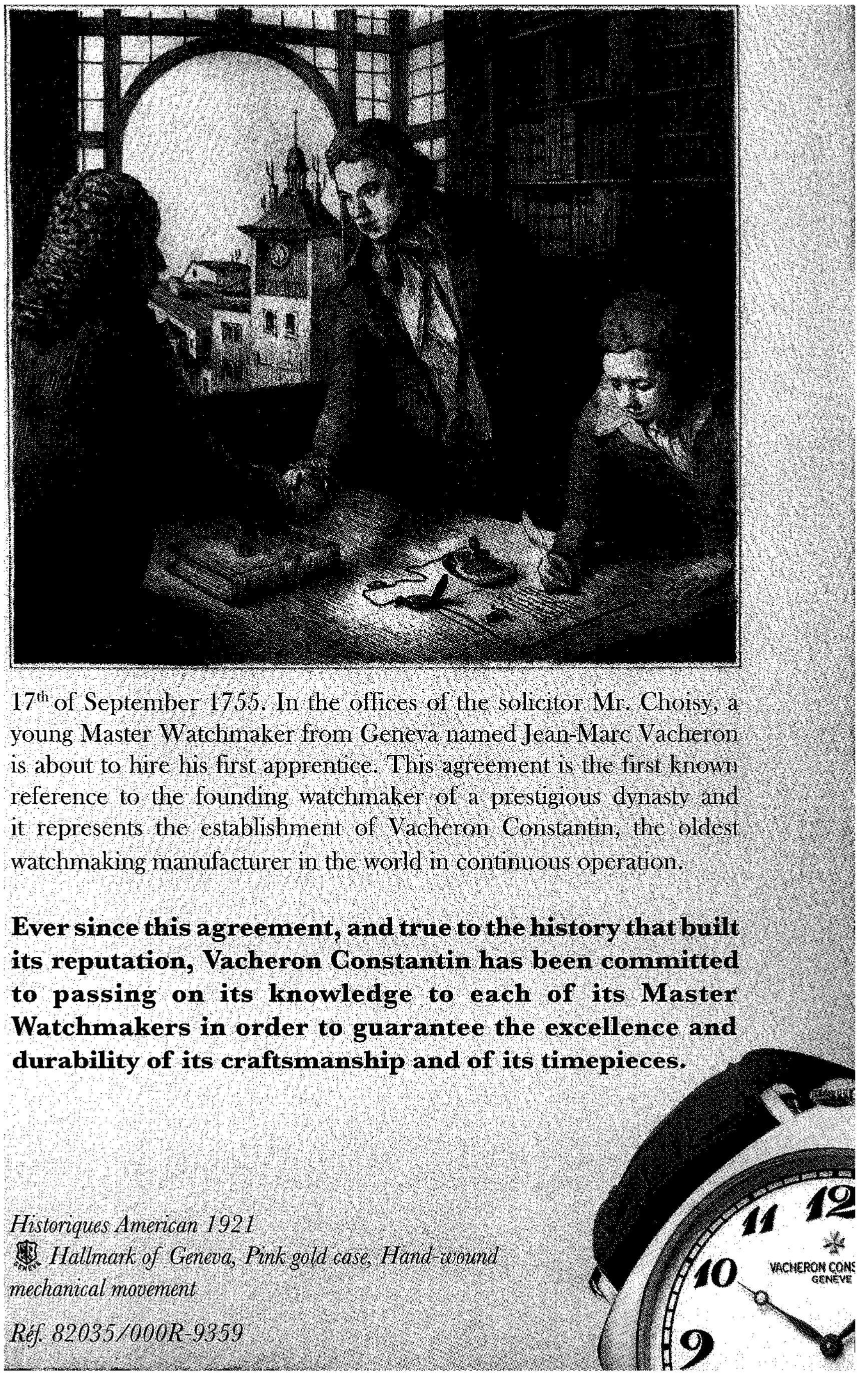
Bertolt Brecht's 1931 play "The Roundheads and the Pointheads" gets a cabaret-style update, under the direction of David Gordon, at Montclair State University. The expert cast includes such downtown luminaries as John Kelly and Valda Setterfield. (See page 16.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
AFTER LONG SILENCE

The past year has been rough for City Opera—an annus horribilis of financial and managerial crises, with only a handful of public performances. This week, the company comes back to life at the newly renovated David H. Koch Theatre with a revival of Hugo Weisgall's Biblical epic "Esther" and a new production of "Don Giovanni." (See page 16.)

MOVIES
THE TRUTH, TO BOOT

The monthlong Italian-neorealism series at the Film Society of Lincoln Center continues with a series of classics from the nineteen-forties: Vittorio De Sica's "Shoeshine" and "Bicycle Thieves"; Roberto Rossellini's "Paisan"; Luigi Zampa's "To Live in Peace"; and "The Earth Cries Out," by Duilio Coletti, a drama about postwar Jewish emigration to Palestine. (See page 22.)



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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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THE AGE OF IRON
To kick off the Classic Stage Company season, Brian Kulick adapts and directs a mashup of Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" and Thomas Heywood's "Iron Age." Previews begin Nov. 6. (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

BRITS OFF BROADWAY
The annual festival includes Matt Wilkinson's "Red Sea Fish," directed by Franklyn McCabe, which opens Nov. 8; "Wolves at the Window," by Toby Davies, directed by Thomas Hescott, which begins previews Nov. 10; and "My Wonderful Day," written and directed by Alan Ayckbourn, which begins previews Nov. 11. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE BROTHER/SISTER PLAYS
Tarell Alvin McCraney premières a trilogy of stories centered on an extended family living in the bayou. Produced in association with the McCarter Theatre. Tina Landau directs "Part 1: In the Red and Brown Water"; Robert O'Hara directs "Part 2: The Brothers Size" and "Marcus; or The Secret of Sweet." In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

CHILDREN AT PLAY
Jordan Seavey wrote this farce, about the tribulations of five high-school friends. Scott Ebersold directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 5. (Living Theatre, 21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101.)

DREAMGIRLS
The Apollo Theatre is the first stop on a national tour of this revival of the 1981 musical, about the rise of an all-girl singing group from Chicago in the sixties. With music by Henry Krieger and a book and lyrics by Tom Eyen; Robert Longbottom choreographs and directs. Previews begin Nov. 7. (253 W. 125th St. 212-307-4100.)

FELA!
Bill T. Jones directs and choreographs this musical about Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the politically active musician who pioneered Afro-beat. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones; music performed onstage by members of Antibalas. In previews. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

IDIOT SAVANT
Willem Dafoe stars in the world première of an avant-garde philosophical comedy written and directed by Richard Foreman, presented in association with the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre. Opens Nov. 4. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY
Les Waters directs Sarah Ruhl's Broadway début, a comedy about marriage, starring Laura Benanti and Michael Cerveris. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LATE CHRISTOPHER BEAN
The Actors Company Theatre puts on Sidney Howard's 1930 comedy, in which a country doctor holds a stash of valuable paintings. In previews. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

LITTLE TRAGEDIES
Green Lamp Press presents the world première in English verse of Pushkin's play, composed of four vignettes that explore life's contradictions. Translated and co-directed by Julian Henry Lowenfeld, and co-directed by Natalya Kolotova, the director of the Maly Dramatic Theatre of St. Petersburg. In previews. Opens Nov. 5. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE MISUNDERSTANDING
At the Flea, Horizon Theatre Rep presents Albert Camus's play, about a man who returns home after a twenty-year absence. Alex Lippard directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 5. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE: PART I
Hallie Foote leads the ensemble performing Horton Foote's play cycle, comprising nine works shown in three parts, produced by Signature Theatre Company and Hartford Stage. Michael Wilson directs. Previews begin Nov. 5. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101.)

Monsters of Folk, at the Beacon Theatre and the United Palace.

QUARTETT
Robert Wilson conceived and directs this experimental work by Heiner Muller, inspired by Choderlos de Laclos's "Les Liaisons Dangereuses." With music by Michael Galasso. Isabelle Huppert stars. Opens Nov. 4. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

RAGTIME
Marcia Milgrom Dodge directs and choreographs the 1998 musical, based on the book by E. L. Doctorow, about life in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century. With a book by Terrence McNally and music and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty. In previews. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.)

THE STARRY MESSENGER
Kenneth Lonergan wrote and directs this drama for the New Group, starring Matthew Broderick as a divorced teacher at a planetarium and Catalina Sandino Moreno ("Maria Full of Grace") as the single mother he falls in love with. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THIS
Julianne Nicholson stars in a new play by Melissa James Gibson, about a widowed failed poet entering her forties who is raising a ten-year-old daughter and starting to date. Directed by Daniel Aukin. Previews begin Nov. 6. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE UNDERSTUDY
Scott Ellis directs the New York première of Theresa Rebeck's backstage comedy, starring Julie White, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, and Justin Kirk. Presented by Roundabout Theatre Company. In previews. Opens Nov. 5. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

WHAT ONCE WE FELT
A new play by Ann Marie Healy, presented by LCT3, about the author of the last novel ever printed. Ken Rus Schmoll directs. In previews. Opens Nov. 9. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

NOW PLAYING

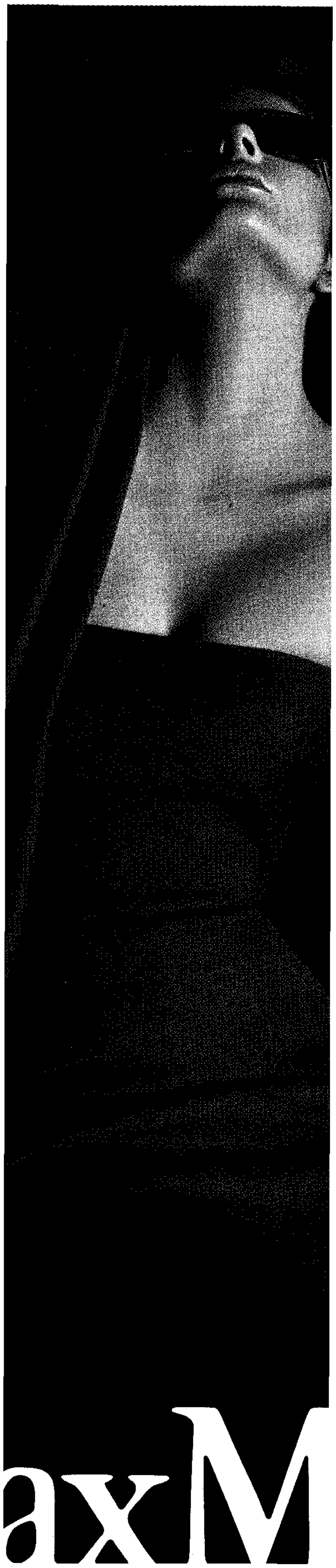
AFTER MISS JULIE
Patrick Marber's version of August Strindberg's gnarly, pathfinding 1888 tragedy, about class division and desire, is transposed from late-nineteenth-century Sweden to England in July, 1945. Of the many circumstances that drive the original, aristocratic Miss Julie into her kitchen to dance with the valet—dusk, the Midsummer festival, her period, her broken engagement, her father's absence from their stately home—the most essential is her hysteria. But, here, Miss Julie (Sienna Miller), in a trim print dress, with perfectly coiffed blond hair, is a picture of commanding cool. Jonny Lee Miller, as John, has a smoldering reserve that suits his servile position and clearly illustrates the class envy that drives the sex and the hate. To understand Miss Julie's toxic mood swings, her refusal to surrender, and her longing for a savior, the audience needs more than sensational spectacle. Instead of luring the heart away from safety, Marber cossets it with melodrama. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/2/09.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

FINIAN'S RAINBOW
Yip Harburg, Burton Lane, and Fred Saidy's zany, enchanted musical from 1947 makes blessed little sense: an Irish man and his comely daughter wander into the Deep South with a pot of gold and a song in their hearts; they are pursued by a leprechaun, and everyone learns an important lesson about racism. A hodgepodge of postwar cheese, topical concerns, and funny accents, the musical is rightfully remembered more for its classic score (including the songs "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" and "Look to the Rainbow") than for its warped plot. Warren Carlyle's revival, first presented at "Encores!," embraces the nuttiness and features such self-assured performers as Jim Norton, Cheyenne Jackson, and Kate Baldwin, who put across the winsome songs with charm and sincerity. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

MEMPHIS
Joe DiPietro and David Bryan, who wrote this twenty-two-song musical (under the direction of Christopher Ashley), left too much in. The story is of the rise of rock and roll from race records to the mainstream, through the reluctant love affair of a Beale Street blues singer and a maverick, illiterate white fan, who becomes a radio d.j. and a spokesman for the rowdy new form of music. The loosey-goosey Chad Kimball, who plays Huey, the d.j., turns in an exceptional performance, full of charm and mischief, as the lost soul who finds his mission in delivering black music to a white audience. Felicia, the object of his desire, is played by the gamine Montego Glover, a petite woman with a big voice, who exudes an aura of fetching sweetness. You leave "Memphis" knowing that you've had an exciting experience, but—unable to recall a song, a melody, or a line of dialogue—you can't quite remember what it was. (11/2/09) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE NEIL SIMON PLAYS: BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS
David Cromer's finely calibrated revival of Neil Simon's memory play (which will run in repertory with "Broadway Bound" starting Nov. 18) is as fresh and

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN RITTER; PHOTOGRAPH (MIDDLE): LUCY HAMBLIN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familiar as toasted rye bread. In nineteen-thirties Brooklyn, fifteen-year-old Eugene (Noah Robbins) dreams of playing for the Yankees and of someday seeing a girl naked. Part of the play's sweetness comes from Eugene's apparent obliviousness of the darker forces surrounding him: the spiritual exhaustion of his mother (Laurie Metcalf), poverty, the encroaching war. Cromer, whose Off Broadway productions of "Adding Machine" and "Our Town" have made him rightfully busy, is a useful match for Simon. Without upstaging the playwright, he compensates for Simon's need to crowd-please with understated humor and diligent attention to emotional detail. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.)

THE NEW ELECTRIC BALLROOM
Druid Theatre performs a play by Enda Walsh, about three Irish sisters who obsess over a rock singer they met in the nineteen-sixties. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

OCTOBERFEST
Ensemble Studio Theatre holds its annual festival of plays new and old, which include Jane Condon's "Raw and Unchained," Horton Foote's "The Carpetbagger's Children," and Chris Ceraso's "Heaven Knows." (549 W. 52nd St. 212-247-4982.)

ORDINARY DAYS
This little musical, about four young people searching for a simple life in a complicated city (New York), is the third production for Roundabout Underground. Two stories are entwined here, and presented entirely in song: though an architect in his thirties has made his way into his girlfriend's apartment, he can't quite find his way into her heart; and, after an ambitious N.Y.U. student loses her thesis in Union Square, she learns a profound truth from the goofball who stumbles upon it. Some good comedic acting and professional singing can't make up for the fact that the composer-lyricist Adam Gwon's characters are two-dimensional and unintentionally childish. The libretto is competent, though, so chances are that as Gwon matures so will his writing. (111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BROKEOLOGY:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **BYE BYE BIRDIE:** Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **COUNTY OF KINGS:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through Nov. 8. **THE EMPEROR JONES:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAMLET:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **LET ME DOWN EASY:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **THE ROYAL FAMILY:** Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **A STEADY RAIN:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SUPERIOR DONUTS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **VIGIL:** DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **WISHFUL DRINKING:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (347-422-0248)—Nov. 6: The folk-inspired **Wingdale Community Singers** are the novelist Rick Moody and the musicians Hannah Marcus, David Grubbs, and Nina Katchadourian (who is also a noted artist). They have a new album, "Spirit Duplicator," of old-timey songs that they deliver with a wink and a nod—their name comes from the upstate town that's known for its creepy, sprawling, and shuttered psychiatric hospital.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (800-745-3000)—Nov. 8: Five years ago, the indie-rockers Jim James, of My Morning Jacket, Conor Oberst and Mike Mogis, of Bright Eyes, and the singer-songwriter M. Ward went on tour together. Since then, they've adopted the name **Monsters of Folk** and have released a self-titled début album. The four are clearly having a good time, mixing harmonies and genres (folk may be a part of their name, but they don't shy away from rock and even soul), and their enjoyment is sure to be contagious at this show.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 6: The new record by the **Girls**, "Album," wraps the listener in a snug blanket of comforting fuzzy tones and jangled percussion while chronicling deeply felt heartbreak. Their front man, Christopher Owens, spent part of his teen-age years in the controversial Children of God cult and then as a runaway in Texas, until he landed with a local millionaire who let him stay on his property in exchange for helping out. This Dickensian story has produced material for earnest songs that are as catchy as they are sincere.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Nov. 4: **Blues Traveler** made a big splash in the mid-nineties, graduating from the local jam-band club circuit (centered on Tribeca's late hippie hot spot, Wetlands) to the big leagues on the strength of the vocals and the harmonica solos of its front man, John Popper, and the band's hook-laden take on traditional rock.

JALOPY THEATRE
315 Columbia St., Red Hook, Brooklyn (718-395-3214)—Nov. 7: The **Two Man Gentleman Band.** Wearing three-piece suits, suspenders, and derby hats and playing banjo, upright bass, and kazoos while engaging in keen vocal harmony, this duo delivers wry and sardonic songs about sex and drinking. The difference between the songs written by its lead singer, Andy Bean—a former author of mathematics textbooks—and the classic, early American rude blues of, say, Bo Carter is in the details. Whereas Carter evoked sex by singing about bananas, pincushions, and pussycats, Bean turns to, well, mathematics. He documents his lover's 37-29-37 figure while she sleeps, proclaiming "My baby's got prime numbers," going on to clarify that "that mean's she's only divisible by one / and that one is gonna be me."

KNITTING FACTORY
361 Metropolitan Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (347-529-6696)—Nov. 8: The **No Neck Blues Band** is a somewhat secretive anti-establishment improvisational collective that has rehearsed weekly, first at a space on the Lower East Side and then at one in Harlem, since 1992. The group's sound, an intense amalgam of free jazz, avant-rock, noise, and Boredoms-inflected vocal freakouts, has attracted such unlikely champions as the late guitar virtuoso John Fahey, who released the band's first studio album on his label. Over the years, the group's lineup has changed only slightly, from eight musicians to seven, and the instrumentation usually includes violin, keyboards, guitars, drums, and various electronics. This show, a relatively rare club outing for a group that traditionally prefers underground events, will also include the Japanese psychedelic outfit **Marble Sheep** and the Chicago-based noise-rockers **Plastic Crimewave Sound.**

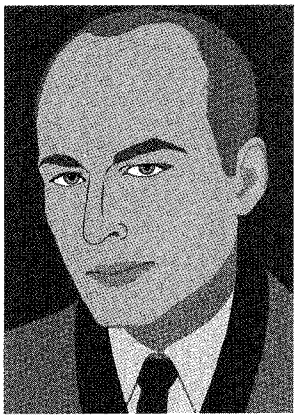
THE MARKET HOTEL
1142 Myrtle Ave., at Broadway, Brooklyn (No phone)—Nov. 7: "Glo-fi," "chillwave," and "hypnagogic pop" are new monikers being created to make sense of the burgeoning contemporary-music scene. Amid the mire of this blog-enabled genre-coining, though, some talented gems stand out, and **Small Black** is one of them. The Long Island duo (which expands to a four-piece group for live performances) crafts hazy reflections on the sound of the eighties—warm nostalgic experiments in post-noise drone and shimmering pop. (For more information, visit www.myspace.com/markethotelnyc.)

THE PHILOCTETES CENTER
At the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, 247 E. 82nd St. (646-422-0544)—Nov. 8: The **Wingdale**

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MATINÉE IDOL

You might not associate avant-garde theatre with sexiness, but, for a time, the Wooster Group embodied it in the form of Ron Vawter. Other members of the company, such as Willem Dafoe and Spalding Gray, went on to have successful film careers, but Vawter, who had AIDS and died in 1994, at forty-five, was a pure theatre animal; with his deep voice, taut frame, and sad, sardonic eyes, he thrilled men and women alike. Born near Albany into a military family, Vawter was working as an Army recruiting officer when he discovered the Performance Group—later rechristened the Wooster Group—and his true vocation: star. You can see him in the recent DVD release "Brace Up!," which includes the Wooster Group's 1993 and 2003 reimaginings of "Three Sisters." (The DVD is part of a series that also includes "The Emperor Jones" and "House/Lights.") At around three hundred and fifty dollars a pop, the DVDs are pricey, but they offer one the opportunity to spend time with Vawter, as though there was no such thing as death.

—*Hilton Als*



YVETTA FEDOROVA

Community Singers (see Barbès). Note: After the show, the band members will engage in a Q. & A. with the audience.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Nov. 6-7: The "Rebel Waltz" concerts kick off the "Performing Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe" festival (see Above and Beyond). In celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Communism, five bands—all at one time in trouble with the authorities—will gather for a unique set of shows. The musically varied groups hail from different countries, but they were all founded prior to 1989 and share a legacy of persecution and underground performance. The first night features the moody, complex sound of the Prague-based **Psí Vojáci** ("Dog Soldiers," in Czech), who played their first gig in 1979, when the band members were thirteen and fourteen years old, only to be registered by the secret police afterward and then banned from "official" gigs. They'll be joined by their horn-driven former countrymen **Bez Ladu a Skladu**, of the Slovak Republic, and the Romanian group **Timpuri Noi**, who opened for everyone from Iron Maiden to Rod Stewart and who play politically ironic songs with an early-eighties, New Wave sensibility. The following night's program includes the legendary Polish punk outfit **Dezerter**, alongside the dark pop of Hungary's **Kontroll Csoport.**

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Nov. 5: The Dadaist punk ensemble **Alice Donut** (the name is trimmed from Alice Donut Liver Henry Moore, a surreal rewriting of the Martin Scorsese film title "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore") first surfaced in the late eighties, playing oddball psychedelic noise-rock with a spiky sense of humor. Nov. 6: The artist and urban-country musician **Andy Friedman** wraps up his fall tour with his new group, the Golden Winners, who are more folk- and string-oriented than his regular honky-tonk band, the Other Failures.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Nov. 8: Australia's **Wolfmother** trades in heavy guitar riffs, harking back to hard rock's golden age. With big hair and wide-leg trousers, the band members have the look to match the sound. Their eponymous first album came out here in 2006; now the band has expanded from a trio to a quartet, and has just released an equally hard-hitting sophomore effort, "Cosmic Egg."

UNITED PALACE
4140 Broadway, at 175th St. (800-745-3000)—Nov. 6: **Monsters of Folk** (see the Beacon Theatre).

THE WOODSER
141 S. 5th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (No phone)—Nov. 5: San Francisco's **Grass Widow** has been making waves lately with its effortless mastery of the all-girl art-punk aesthetic. The group is in New York for a week of shows (for a full schedule of their local appearances, visit www.myspace.com/grasswidowmusic), but this has the potential to be the best one. One of the reasons: the bill includes the live début of **Frankie and the Outs,** the new project of Frankie Rose, a talented multi-instrumentalist who has associated herself with the Vivian Girls, Crystal Stilts, and the Dum Dum Girls in the past few years. (For more information, visit www.toddpnyc.com.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 3-8: The annual **Django Reinhardt Festival,** celebrating its tenth anniversary, brings together topflight American jazz musicians and European players who are well versed in the music of the legendary Gypsy guitarist. The bassist and musical director **Brian Torff** joins the guitarists **Tchavolo Schmitt** and his nephew **Samson, Andreas Oberg,** and **Ted Gottsegan,** the accordionist **Ludovic Beier,** and the violinist **Aurore Voilqué.** The guest soloists include the saxophonist **Joel Frahm,** on Nov. 3, and the trumpeters **Dominick Farinacci,** on Nov. 4, and **Terell Stafford,** on Nov. 5.

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-614-0505)—Nov. 8: An all-day benefit concert for the Jazz Foundation of America, which supports both the music and its elderly players, salutes the ESP-Disk' label, home to some of the edgiest free-jazz artists of the sixties. While the likes of Albert Ayler and Sun Ra are long gone, such committed figures as **Giuseppi Logan, Sonny Simmons, Joe Morris,** and **Warren Smith** will be on hand.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Starting Nov. 10: The jovial, rough-voiced singer **Steve Tyrell,** who has found an unlikely haven at this storied uptown night spot.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Nov. 3-8: The music for the 1959 film "Black Orpheus" generated such bossa-nova standards as "Manhã de Carnaval" and "A Felicidade." The bassist **Nilson Matta** and his band **Brazilian Voyage,** which here includes the pianist **Kenny Barron,** revives the classic score.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Nov. 4-8: **Steve Gadd,** the dean of studio drummers, indulges his funky leanings with a quartet that includes the organist **Joey DeFrancesco** and the baritone saxophonist **Ronnie Cuber.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Nov. 5: The dexterous guitarist **Gene Bertoncini** is joined by the bassist **Sean Smith** and the drummer **Rich DeRosa.** Nov. 6-8: The **Vijay Iyer** trio, featuring the leader's knotty piano playing and nimble contributions from the bassist **Stephan Crump** and the drummer **Marcus Gilmore,** draws on free jazz, Iyer's Indian heritage, and, as exhibited on the recent album "Historicity," a wide range of sources, from Leonard Bernstein to M.I.A. Nov. 9: The **Mingus Big Band.** Nov. 10: The soprano saxophonist **Jane Ira Bloom** directs the **New School Jazz Ensemble** in a program of music by Ornette Coleman.

NUBLU
62 Avenue C, between 4th and 5th Sts. (212-979-9925)—This innovative East Village club has put together an ambitious lineup for the first Nublu Jazz Festival, offering variants of the form that range from free to hip-hop-infused. It gets under way on Nov. 5, with performances by **Juini Booth, Charles Gayle,** and **Jameel Moondoc.** Other highlights from the first week include the **Al Foster** quartet, on Nov. 7, and a shared bill featuring **Bill McHenry** and **Ben Perowsky's Moodswing Orchestra,** on Nov. 9. The festival runs through Nov. 22.

PUPPET'S JAZZ BAR
481 Fifth Ave., between 11th and 12th Sts., Brooklyn (718-499-2622)—Nov. 4: The trumpeter **John McNeil** (who has a weekly engagement here on Wednesdays) and his exceptional free-bop quartet, a two-horn, pianoless unit manned by vibrant younger players, each on the cusp of greater acclaim.

SYMPHONY SPACE
Broadway at 95th St. (212-545-7536)—Nov. 5-6: The **Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra,** under the direction of Arturo O'Farrill, celebrates its seventh anniversary with a program of new works (including a tribute to Sonia Sotomayor), along with the "African Sunrise Suite," featuring its composer, the pianist **Randy Weston.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 3-8: No living musician exemplifies the funky side of Blue Note Records' classic era like the irrepressible alto saxophonist **Lou Donaldson.** He's here with his quartet, featuring the organist **Lou Bianchi.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Vermeer's Masterpiece 'The Milkmaid.'"** Through Nov. 29. ♦

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"Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868." Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Watteau, Music, and Theater."** Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Eccentric Visions: The World of Luo Ping (1733-1799)."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity."** Opens Nov. 8. ♦ **"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Projects 91: Artur Zmijewski."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Paul Sietsema."** Through Feb. 15. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Anish Kapoor: Memory."** Through March 28. ♦ **"Paired, Gold: Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Roni Horn."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"Intervals: Kitty Kraus."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Roni Horn aka Roni Horn."** Opens Nov. 6. ♦ **"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Steve Wolfe on Paper."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Who Shot Rock & Roll: A Photographic History, 1955 to the Present."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ.'"** Through Jan. 17. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 31. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Design USA: Contemporary Innovation."** Through April 4. ♦ **"Design for a Living World."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DIA AT THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-926-2234)—**"Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: Chronotopes & Dioramas."** Through April 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 4:30, and Sundays, 1 to 4.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"Serizawa: Master of Japanese Textile Design."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"A Woman's Wit: Jane Austen's Life and Legacy."** Opens Nov. 6. ♦ **"William Blake's World: 'A New Heaven Is Begun.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Rococo and Revolution: Eighteenth-Century French Drawings."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"Voces y Visiones: Four Decades Through El Museo del Barrio's Permanent Collection."** Through Feb. 28. ♦ **"Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis."** Through Feb. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF COMIC AND CARTOON ART
594 Broadway, at Houston St. (212-254-3511)—**"Peter Kuper: Diario de Oaxaca."** Through Nov. 21. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"From Klimt to Klee: Masterworks from the Serge Sabarsky Collection."** Through Feb. 15. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty."** Through Feb. 7. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"1969."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Between Spaces."** Through April 5. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"O Zhang: Cutting the Blaze to New Frontiers."** Through March 13. ♦ **"Duke Riley: Those About to Die Salute You."** Through March 13. ♦ **"Daniel Bozhkov: Republic of Perpetual Reconstitution and Rebuild."** Through March 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, noon to 5.)

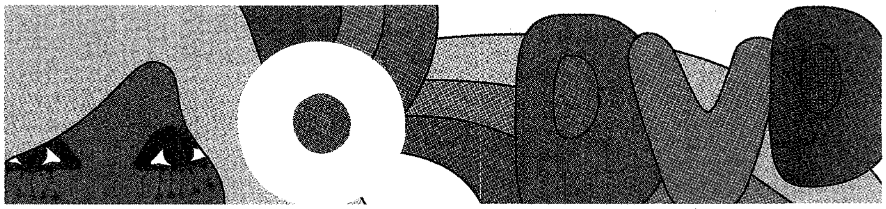
RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—**"The Red Book of C. G. Jung."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"A Voyage of Growth and Discovery: Mike Kelley and Michael Smith."** Through Dec. 30. ♦ **"In Practice Fall 2009."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

EVE SONNEMAN
Sonneman brings her trademark style to the Côte d'Azur in a new series of paired color photographs, taken at the same place moments or minutes apart. In some diptychs, this recalls the side-by-side pictures, taken from slightly different vantage points, in old-fashioned stereoscope views. In other pieces, either Sonneman or her subjects (boaters, bathers, strollers by the sea) have moved so significantly that the pairings suggest jump cuts rather than successive frames. There's a casual quality to the images, many of which are as weightless as a tourist's snapshot, but the format conveys a leisurely sense of time passing and pleasures indulged. Through Nov. 7. (Haime, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-3550.)

"SILVER ANNIVERSARY"
The gallery celebrates twenty-five years in business with a remarkable group of mostly nineteenth-century photographs. Among images by Steichen, Stieglitz, Cameron, and Käsebier are several from photography's earliest years, including a daguerreotype by Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey of an Egyptian woman who emerges from a silvery mist like an apparition, and a delicate, foggy fragment by William Henry Fox Talbot, which is shown only on request. Landscapes and architectural views predominate, and none is more arresting than Humphry Lloyd Hime's picture of a Canadian prairie that's as modern and minimal as a Sugimoto seascape, save for a skull and a bone in the foreground. Through Nov. 20. (Kraus, 962 Park Ave., at 82nd St. 212-794-2064.)


KARI MODEN

DVD NOTES
THE VIEW FROM ABROAD

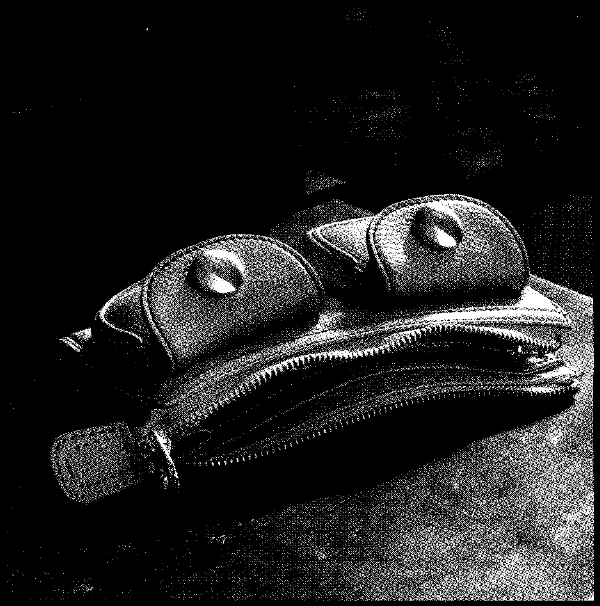
Hollywood has always been a haven for immigrants with talent. One of the greatest, Ernst Lubitsch, arrived there from Germany in the early nineteen-twenties, not pushed by political turmoil but pulled by money. American wealth is at the heart of his 1938 comedy, "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife," one of the offerings in **"The Claudette Colbert Collection,"** a six-film set from Universal.

Gary Cooper stars as a self-made tycoon vacationing on the Riviera who meets cute with Colbert in a department store when he tries to buy only a pajama top (she offers to buy the bottom). Colbert is the daughter of a penniless aristocrat (Edward Everett Horton), whose wiles turn out to be as refined as his manners. The story—about a noble family that's down on its luck and is willing to sell off its daughter to a wealthy but uncouth commoner—is straight out of Henry James, but Lubitsch (working from a script co-written by another European immigrant, Billy Wilder) turns it into an elegantly eroticized version of "The Taming of the Shrew," with results that are as funny as they are subtly grotesque.

In 1944, for his second American film, Douglas Sirk—born Claus Detlev Sierck, also a German émigré—cast his gaze eastward. **"Summer Storm"** (VCI Entertainment), an adaptation of a novel by Chekhov, stars George Sanders (born in Russia) as Fedya, a judge and a dashing playboy, whose dissolute ways have got him demoted to a provincial resort town. There, he plans to marry Nadina (Anna Lee), an educated woman who appeals to his higher instincts—until he is snared in the seductive web of Olga (Linda Darnell), a sexy, cunning, and ambitious peasant girl who knows the market value of her beauty and whose highest bidder is a frivolous nobleman (again, Edward Everett Horton, in a surprisingly effective dramatic performance), who is also Fedya's best friend.

Sirk's exquisite touch with surfaces matches his deft way with actors; the gilded mirrors and shimmering silks of the upper classes contrast bitterly with the grim deprivations of peasant life. He updated the story so that the action is framed by the Revolution, and, while juxtaposing tsarist and Soviet realities, he winked at America, too, where Fedya dreams of escaping with Olga—but her grandiose plans, she says, are too big for a land "where everybody's equal."

—Richard Brody



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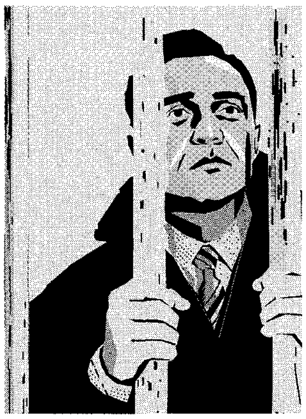
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
RAMBLING MAN

"Are you staying or going?" That question, put to the brooding, itinerant Aldo (Steve Cochran), resounds through Michelangelo Antonioni's 1957 film "Il Grido," which screens at BAM on Nov. 9. It remains one of his least recognized films but also one of his most beautiful, and certainly the saddest. The beauty lies not in places or possessions, for it is the workingman's life, steeped in fog and ankle-deep mud, on the flatlands of the Po, that Antonioni investigates here; people embrace against a pile of dug earth, not amid the cushioned trappings of the bourgeoisie. Aldo takes his young daughter, leaving behind her mother (Alida Valli), and travels in search of employment, or peace of mind; he finds little of either, relying instead on the brief passions ignited by an old flame (Betsy Blair), the owner of a gas station (the splendidly named Dorian Gray), and a prostitute (Lyn Shaw) who ekes out her existence in a leaking shack. The movie is often viewed as a bridge between the director's livelier early films and his coolly formal later ones, but it stands, lyrical and forlorn, on its own.

—*Anthony Lane*



KIM DEMARCO

Short List

PHILIP GUSTON: McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951. Opens Nov. 5. **DAVID HOCKNEY:** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through Dec. 24. **GERHARD RICHTER:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Opens Nov. 7. **EGON SCHIELE:** Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 212-245-6734. Through Jan. 23. **TOM WESSELMANN:** Haunch of Venison, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, at 49th St. 212-259-0000. Opens Nov. 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

PAUL CHAN

The reliably arcane Chan laces sexual frenzy with heady lucubration in work inspired (if that's the word) by the Marquis de Sade. Projected animations alternate between jittery silhouettes of figures in orgiastic action and drifting abstract geometries in handsome colors. Big drawings intersperse sober alphabet fonts with quotations of Sadean (very) dirty talk. The payoff, for aspirants to Chan's brand of cool, may be the enjoyment of an antinomian will to power, buffered by aesthetic and intellectual finesse. Less avid viewers may wonder at so much tacit reverence for a creep. Through Dec. 5. (Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)

HOPE GANGLOFF

This young drawing whiz shows large paintings of pretty, languid friends that are mannered and feel trendy, pleasantly. They conflate lapidary facture à la Gustav Klimt and the everyday eros of Elizabeth Peyton, with a dash of Neue Sachlichkeit. Pale-fleshed lads and lasses project second-nature chic, just slightly decadent, in modest circumstances. One subject is a plainly overqualified waitress with a dainty tattoo, lurching to grab a bottle of Tabasco sauce. A clamorous, gravity-free still-life celebrates a world emblematized by beer, soda, and wine bottles; fancy shoes and umbrellas; containers of Chinese food, salt, and matches; and what looks like a Geiger counter. Through Nov. 25. (Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111.)

JUSTINE KURLAND

Kurland, who has always taken pictures of people adrift in the American wilderness, devotes this terrific show to cross-country trains and the free spirits who hitch rides on them. Many of her landscapes recall the West as the pioneering photographers saw it: awe-inspiringly vast and just plain beautiful. But she calls her pictures "portals into the realm of railroad folklore," because she's also documented the subculture that's sprung up around the trains—gray-bearded hobos, young drifters, and her own little boy, obsessed with the endless line of freight cars in the distance. Kurland understands the American impulse to light out for the country, and her pictures capture both its romance and its tough reality. Through Nov. 14. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

JACK PIERSON

Repetition has leached Pierson's salvaged junk signage—a romance with American desuetude—of its once poetic charisma. Now each new Pierson evokes mainly old Piersons. Apparently conscious of the problem, the artist goes all out for formal elegance in a show titled "Abstracts." Suavely composed found sign parts make for gravely monumental reliefs and sculpture, begging admittance to museums and other ceremonial spaces. Pierson's brand of vernacular beauty proves to have legs. Through Nov. 14. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

MATTHEW RITCHIE

Ritchie's former science-y espousals of the cosmological sublime, with diagrams of the big bang which invited and defeated comprehension, have given way to sheer entertainment value, in mind-blown, seductive paintings, sculptures, and a projected video animation. A huge steel sculpture and a vast wall painting, which frames the asymmetrical video, are of hyper-complex, crazed-doily design. The aureate, fine-grained moving images, enhanced with avant-garde-ish music and with voices reciting texts that range from "Paradise Lost" to baseball commentary, represent abstractly crashing seas, blizzarding feathers, and other agreeable catastrophes. What's it all about? Who cares? Through Dec. 2. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

BILL VIOLA

Fans of Viola's symbolism-besotted, humor-free videos will find lots to love among the many monitors and installations arrayed here, displaying works old and recent. For his chief new trick, in a series called "Transfigurations," Viola shoots people, clothed or not, dimly approaching what turns out to be a thick curtain of falling water. They emerge, duly soaked, from grainy analog black-and-white into high-def color and ape profound—make that "profound"—emotions, none of which admit the fun or annoyance of having been splooshed. Pass the soap. Through Dec. 19. (James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

Short List

ANDREA BOWERS: Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Through Dec. 5. **EMILIE CLARK:** Morgan Lehman, 317 Tenth Ave., at 28th St. 212-268-6699. Through Nov. 14. **CARROLL DUNHAM:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Dec. 5. **NICOLE EISENMAN:** Koenig, 545 W. 23rd St. 212-334-9255. Through Dec. 23. **PETER FISCHLI & DAVID WEISS:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Jan. 16. **DAN FLAVIN:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Opens Nov. 5. **WAYNE GONZALES:** Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Dec. 18. **DAVID HOCKNEY:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through Dec. 24. **EMILY JACIR:** Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-367-7474. Through Nov. 28. **MICHAEL JOO:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Dec. 5. **SISTER CORITA KENT:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Dec. 5. **MARK MANDERS:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through Dec. 19. **SARAH MORRIS:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Dec. 5. **WALID RAAD:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Opens Nov. 6. **PETER SACKS:** Rodgers/9W, 529 W. 20th St. 212-414-9810. Through Dec. 12. **RICHARD SERRA:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through Dec. 23. **SIMON STARLING:** Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335. Through Dec. 19. **"ON TOP OF THE WHALE":** Algus, 511 W. 25th St. 212-242-6242. Through Dec. 5.

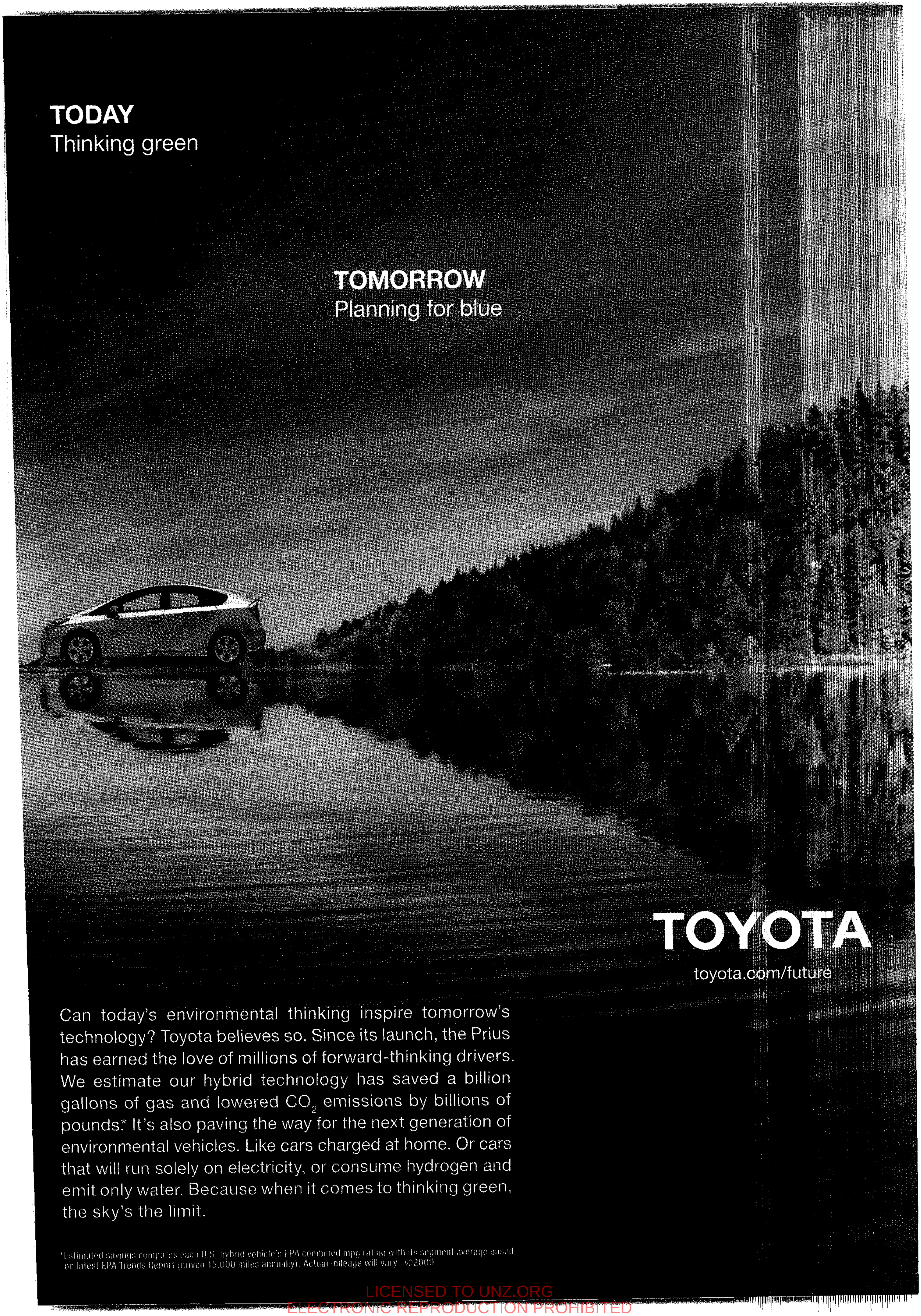
GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

NEIL WINOKUR

Winokur's portraits of artists and friends, made in the eighties, look even better in retrospect. Forty of the garishly colored photographs are here, many on view for the first time. Among the throng are Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Philip Glass, Mary Boone, and Andy Warhol, most of whom pose before neon-bright backdrops, facing forward, passport-picture style. The results are far from flattering but irresistible even when the subject isn't famous. Like Thomas Ruff's eighties portraits (most of which Winokur's predate), they have a matter-of-fact documentary quality that avoids any pretense of psychological depth while allowing us to absorb every ravishing (or off-putting) detail of the surface. Through Nov. 25. (Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

Short List

BARRY X BALL: Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through Dec. 12. **BROCK ENRIGHT:** Beauchene, 21 Orchard St. 212-375-8043. Through Nov. 29. **R. M. FISCHER:** K.S. Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918. Through Dec. 19. **JONAS MEKAS:** Fuentes, 35 St. James Pl. 212-577-1201. Through Nov. 25. **LAURA OWENS:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Nov. 21. **ERIN SHIRREFF:** Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564. Through Dec. 20. **"STUART SHERMAN: NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE":** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Opens Nov. 8.



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*Estimated savings compares each U.S. hybrid vehicle's EPA combined mpg rating with its segment average based on latest EPA Trends Report (driven 15,000 miles annually). Actual mileage will vary. ©2009

DANCE

HAN TANG YUEFU MUSIC AND DANCE ENSEMBLE
In "The Feast of Han Xizai," the Taiwan-based troupe interprets delicate scenes from a Tang-dynasty painting. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 3-4 at 7:30, Nov. 5-7 at 8, and Nov. 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

ARMITAGE GONE! DANCE / "ITUTU"
Despite her highbrow reputation and thorny style, Karole Armitage is no stranger to pop. With "Itutu" (which means "cool" in the Yoruba language), she finds a new groove in the infectious polyrhythms and vocals of Afropop (by the band Burkina Electric), intercut with Lukas Ligeti's more abstract compositions for electric marimba. But Armitage never condescends to the music or to her audience—this is complex, lashing, sometimes unfriendly movement, performed by her adventurous dancers. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Nov. 4 and Nov. 6-7 at 7:30.)

"UNCIVIL WARS: MOVING W/ BRECHT & EISLER"
Under the direction of the wily postmodernist David Gordon, "The Roundheads and the Pointheads," Bertolt Brecht's 1931 Marxist parable about how politicians distract from the conflict between rich and poor by focussing on less important differences, takes on new life. Scenes from the biographies of Brecht and the composer Hanns Eisler are effectively integrated with their songs, and explanations of Brecht's theatrical theories are but one of the ways those theories are playfully enacted. The ensemble, which includes Valda Setterfield and John Kelly, is so uniformly excellent, so charming, that the overriding effect is not alienation but pleasure. (Alexander Kasser, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J. 973-655-5112. Nov. 5-6 at 7:30, Nov. 7 at 8, and Nov. 8 at 3.)

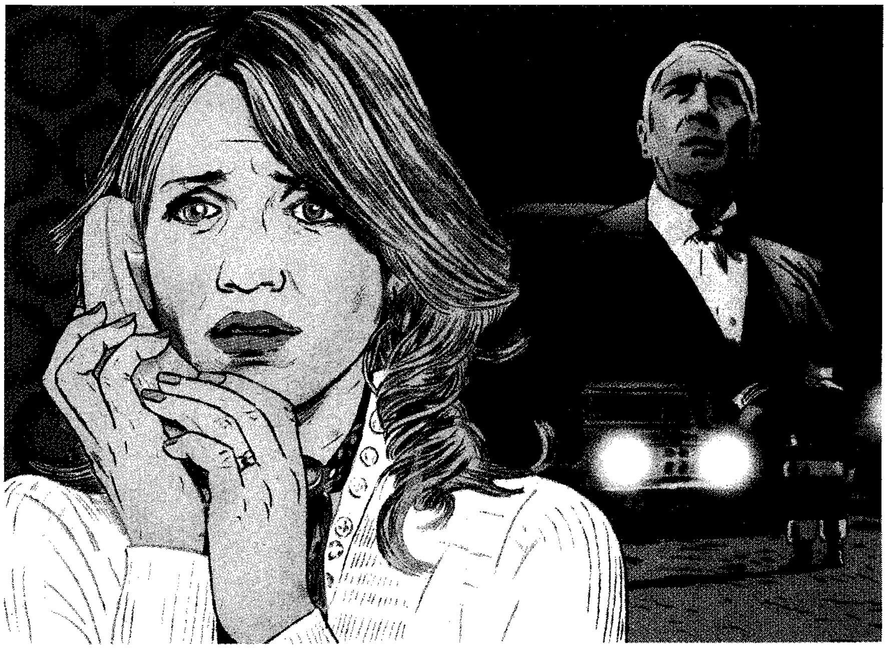
HARKNESS DANCE CENTER 75TH ANNIVERSARY GALA
The Harkness Dance Center looks back at its storied history with an evening of works and excerpts by some of the choreographers who have graced its halls, among them Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Katherine Dunham, Jerome Robbins, Alvin Ailey, David Parsons, and Doug Varone. The shadow of giants should be apparent, but so will the continued thriving in that shadow. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Nov. 5 at 8.)

NANCY GARCIA / CHASE GRANOFF
The online video portion of Garcia's "I Need More," which is connected to her new album, "Be the Climb," consists of a woman jackhammering her high-heeled boots against a brick wall. The punk vocals of the soundtrack also suggest the inspiration and the method, a choreographic equivalent of feedback. Granoff, who is also known to pump up the volume, turns to the dance manuals of Doris Humphrey and Simone Forti, as well as to films by Godard, to make his own subversive piece, "The Art of Making Dances." Along with earplugs, consider bringing your wallet: Garcia's album and a book about Granoff's project will be for sale at the theatre. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Nov. 5-7 at 8.)

TACITA DEAN / "CRANEWAY EVENT"
Last year, the visual artist Tacita Dean, known for her 16-mm. films that explore such subjects as history and the passage of time, captured several days of rehearsal by Merce Cunningham and his dancers, who were putting together one of his "events," to be performed in an abandoned Ford factory in California. The resulting film, which is the last to show Cunningham at work, will première at Danspace this week as part of the Performa 09 arts festival. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. For tickets, visit www.performa-arts.org. Nov. 5 at 8:30 and Nov. 6-7 at 6 and 8:30.)

"AUF DEN TISCH"
As part of Performa 09, the expatriate American choreographer Meg Stuart curates a kind of improvised dance conference. The title (in German, "At the Table") refers to a table, both actual and metaphorical, around which the audience and Stuart's invited participants gather. Since those participants include such unpredictable and fearless figures as Keith Hennessy, Trajal Harrell, Yvonne Meier, Hahn Rowe, and David Thomson, who knows what boundary-testing discussions and activities might ensue. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-868-4444. Nov. 6-7 at 7:30.)

MINERVA TAPIA DANCE GROUP
Trained in Mexico, Cuba, and California, Minerva Tapia has returned to the border area between Tijuana and San Diego to found her own company, which presents socially conscious, mostly abstract works. In "Border Dances," she uses an organic, modern-dance-based movement style to explore issues concerning the female body, from its transformation by plastic surgery to its endangerment by the drug trade. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Nov. 6-7 at 8.)



Cameron Diaz and Frank Langella star in "The Box," opening Nov. 6.

RUTH GWILY

DOUG VARONE / "STRIPPED"
For the second of his studio showings, Varone will present an excerpt from his newest work-in-progress, "Chapters from a Broken Novel"—a series of intimate portraits drawn from the choreographer's musings on books and movies, and from his observations of people around him—as well as a look back at some of his earlier works, including the 1994 trio "Aperture," a kind of conversation through gesture. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-279-3344. Nov. 6 at 8.)

TAYLOR 2
As a kind of housewarming—the Paul Taylor Dance Company recently relocated from SoHo to new digs on the Lower East Side—the Abrons Arts Center is hosting a free performance of Paul Taylor works at its jewel-box theatre. Taylor 2, the small touring group formed in 1993 as an adjunct to the main company, will present two Taylor favorites, "Esplanade" and "Company B." (466 Grand St. 212-598-0400. Nov. 8 at 2.)

VIRSKY UKRAINIAN NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY
Ukraine's tradition of folk dance and military dance is wonderfully rich, characterized by bravura jumps and turns for the men and lyrical, mincing steps for the women. In the late thirties, Pavlo Virsky co-founded this touring troupe; now led by Virsky's onetime student Myroslav Vantukh, the company performs at the Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts. (2900 Campus Rd., at Hillel Pl., Brooklyn. 718-951-4500. Nov. 8 at 2.)

"SUNDAYS AT THREE"
At the 92nd Street Y, the New York Theatre Ballet, a company that has done much to preserve the legacy of Agnes de Mille, will present various excerpts from her concert and Broadway works—including bits from "Brigadoon," "Oklahoma!," and "American Suite." (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Nov. 8 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Il Barbiere di Siviglia," offered with an able cast that includes Joyce DiDonato (as Rosina), Barry Banks, Franco Vassallo, John Del Carlo, and Roberto Scandiuzzi; Maurizio Benini conducts. (Nov. 4 at 8 and Nov. 7 at 8:30.) ♦ Robert Lepage's interactive production of **"La Damnation de Faust"** uses fantastical video images (which fluctuate according to the singers' movements and voices), superimposed on a giant scaffold of a set, to inject drama into Berlioz's quasi-operatic oratorio about literature's most famous overachiever. As Méphistophélès shows Faust a life of earthly pleasures, a troupe of twirling dancers and demon acrobats conjures a world of beauty, cynicism, and filth. Ramón Vargas, Olga Borodina, and Ildar Abdrazakov are the work's tireless trio of soloists; the orchestra, under James Conlon, renders the composer's harrowing music with an exacting touch and hurricane-strength force. (Nov. 5 and Nov. 9 at 8.) ♦ Sonja Frisell's grand production of **"Aida"** features Violeta Urmana, Dolora Zajick, Richard Margison, and Carlo Guelfi in the leading roles; Paolo Carignani. (Nov. 6 at 8.) ♦ Franco Zeffirelli's production of "Tosca" may be history, but the Met is unlikely to tamper with his staging of **"Turandot,"** which, in its magnificent overabundance, offers a shimmering vision of ancient China that audiences love to believe in. The musical side of Puccini's final opera would seem to be in good hands, with Maria Guleghina in the title role, Marina Poplavskaya as Liù, and Marcello Giordani as Calaf; Andris Nelsons. (Lise Lindstrom, making her Met début, replaces Guleghina in the second performance.) (Nov. 7 at 1 and Nov. 10 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
The company, having dragged itself back from the precipice under the leadership of its general manager and artistic director, George Steel, celebrates its heritage with "American Voices," a gala opening concert in Lincoln Center's new David H. Koch Theatre. A distinguished lineup of singers—including Amy Burton, Joyce Castle, Lauren Flanigan, Anthony Dean Griffey, and Samuel Ramey, under the direc-

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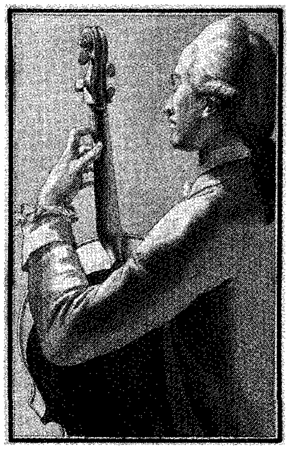
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FRENCH CONNECTION

Pluck a magnifying glass from a rack at the Frick and sift great from good in "Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection." The prodigious Dutch connoisseur Lugt (1884-1970), a collector by the age of eight, acquired thousands of Old Master drawings, with a special fondness for the French eighteenth century. His successors at the Fondation Custodia, in Paris, have added nineteenth-century works, mostly Romantic and Barbizon landscapes. These excite far less than Lugt's ancien-régime gems, including an incredible street scene by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, "Le Boulevard" (circa 1760), whose bustling carriages, outdoor diners, urchin, beggar, and dog suggest a bewigged Reginald Marsh. The diminutive Fragonard (less than five feet tall) charms with a swift, sweet self-portrait. A tangy pocket drama by Nicolas Lavreince epitomizes the glad erotic cynicism of the seventeen-eighties: a gent springs a kiss on a lady as her chaperone dozes and a painted portrait sulks in the shadow of a curtain. That would be the husband.



PIERRE-PAUL PRUD'HON, "THE CELLIST, HALF LENGTH, THREE-QUARTER BACK VIEW, TURNED TOWARD THE LEFT" (1777-78), COURTESY FONDATION CUSTODIA

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

tion of George Manahan and Julius Rudel—will perform music by Bernstein, Barber, Golijov, Gershwin, and Weill, among others; the New York City Ballet will dance to the accompaniment of John Adams's "Hallelujah Junction"; and Rufus Wainwright will perform as a special guest. (Nov. 5 at 7.) ♦ The first operatic presentation at the new theatre is a bit of unfinished business. The torrent of critical praise that greeted the 1993 world première of Hugo Weisgall's Biblical epic **"Esther,"** a thorny but powerful and expertly crafted music drama, raised hopes for a revival, which the company never delivered. Now that's been set aright, with the vivid Flanigan—City Opera's prima donna—returning to the title role. James Maddalena and Beth Clayton are also featured; Manahan conducts. (Nov. 7 at 8.) ♦ Christopher Alden, never a shy director, is at the helm of the season's only new production, **"Don Giovanni"**; the leading role will be seized by Daniel Okulitch, a fine Canadian baritone who gained notoriety for appearing nude in the Los Angeles Opera's misbegotten production of Howard Shore's "The Fly." The good-looking (and talented) cast also features Jason Hardy, Stefania Dovhan, Keri Alkema, Joélle Harvey, and Gregory Turay; Gary Thor Wedow. (Nov. 8 at 1:30 and Nov. 10 at 7:30.) (212-721-6500.)

BLEECKER STREET OPERA: "L'AMORE DEI TRE RE"
Out of the ashes of Amato Opera comes this new company, which is adding a welcome dose of professionalism to the feisty amateur ethos that made Amato charming yet unpredictable. Their first assignment is a bold one, a revival of Italo Montemezzi's durable verismo tragedy from 1913, a swirl of impassioned Wagnerian harmony and gentle Debussyan declamation. (Theatres at 45 Bleecker St. 212-260-8250. Nov. 4 at 1, Nov. 7 at 5, and Nov. 8 at 7. Through Nov. 15.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The Philharmonic takes on the sweeping "Lyric Symphony" (1922-23), by Alexander von Zemlinsky (Schoenberg's brother-in-law), a double song cycle for baritone and soprano which sets texts by Rabindranath Tagore in a style that compellingly combines elements of Mahler and Puccini. Hillevi Martinpelto (making her début) and Thomas Hampson (in residence with the orchestra this season) are the soloists, with Neeme Järvi conducting; Mozart's "Prague" Symphony opens the concerts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Nov. 5 and Nov. 10 at 7:30 and Nov. 6-7 at 8.)

"ANCIENT PATHS, MODERN VOICES"
Carnegie Hall's ambitious festival of Chinese music comes to a close with a parade of distinguished orchestras through Stern Auditorium. Nov. 4 at 8: Works by two Chinese-American composers who have brilliantly adapted Western sources to their own ends—Tan Dun ("Water Concerto," with the percussionist Colin Currie) and Bright Sheng—lie at the center of a St. Louis Symphony Orchestra program led by its dynamic conductor, David Robertson. The concert is bookended by two classic "Orientalist" works, Stravinsky's "Song of the Nightingale" and Bartók's "Miraculous Mandarin" Suite. ♦ Nov. 7 at 8: Robert Spano conducts the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra—along with a special guest, Yo-Yo Ma—in "Awakening from a Disappearing Garden," by the up-and-coming composer Angel Lam, before launching into a complete concert performance of Stravinsky's luminous opera "The Nightingale," a fable of ancient China (featuring the singers Celena Shafer, Jessica Rivera, and Vinson Cole, among others). ♦ Nov. 10 at 8: The Shanghai Symphony—the country's oldest Western-style orchestra—and its conductor, Long Yu, brings down the curtain with a concert of stark contrasts: the indomitable Lang Lang performs Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2, and a group of fine Chinese musicians on traditional instruments (and the sopranos Xiaoduo Chen and Meng Meng) join the orchestra in "Iris Dévoilée," by the eminent composer Chen Qigang. (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
The first of three programs at the floating chamber-music series this week is offered by one of its regular guests, the all-female Neolit Ensemble, which performs music for flute, cello, and piano by a diverse group of prominent composers that includes Tania León ("Alma"), Kaija Saariaho, and Hilary Tann. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Nov. 4 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "SCHUBERT ASCENDING"
This three-concert festival—like the upcoming round of Beethoven quartets and sonatas—is a bit of "stay-cation" programming in a fiscally conservative environment. It's the brainchild of the pianist Inon Barnatan (one of this year's Avery Fisher Career Grant winners), who, in the first program, joins such gifted young colleagues as the pianist Orion Weiss and the Borromeo String Quartet for an evening that includes Schubert's Piano Sonata in C Minor, D. 958, and the String Quintet in C Major. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Nov. 6 at 7:30. For full schedule, see www.chambermusicsociety.org.)

"COMPOSER PORTRAIT: GALINA USTVOLSKAYA"
Miller Theatre's latest venture into the ultra-modern examines the œuvre of this highly idiosyncratic student of Shostakovich, whose music is both ascetic and overwhelmingly intense. The Fifth House Ensemble performs "Octet," "Composition 2," and other works. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Nov. 7 at 8.)

KELLER QUARTET
Continuing its "Hungarian Accents" series, the 92nd Street Y invites the admired ensemble (headed by the violinist András Keller) to perform string quartets by Beethoven (in F Major, Op. 135, and the "Grosse Fuge"), Bartók, and Ligeti (No. 1, "Métamorphoses Nocturnes"). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Nov. 8 at 3.)

(LE) POISSON ROUGE: "IN C"
Michigan's Grand Valley State University New Music Ensemble, whose recording of Steve Reich's "Music for 18 Musicians" became a cult hit in 2007, returns to New York to offer a performance of Terry Riley's "In C," another minimalist masterpiece. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Nov. 8 at 7:30.)

CAROL WINCENC RUBY ANNIVERSARY: "DEEPEST DESIRES"
In the first of three programs this season, the boldly elegant flutist celebrates her fortieth year on the concert stage with an evening unabashedly devoted to works by American composers: Jake Heggie, Lukas Foss, Paul Schoenfield, and George Crumb (the classic "Voice of the Whale"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Nov. 9 at 7:30.)

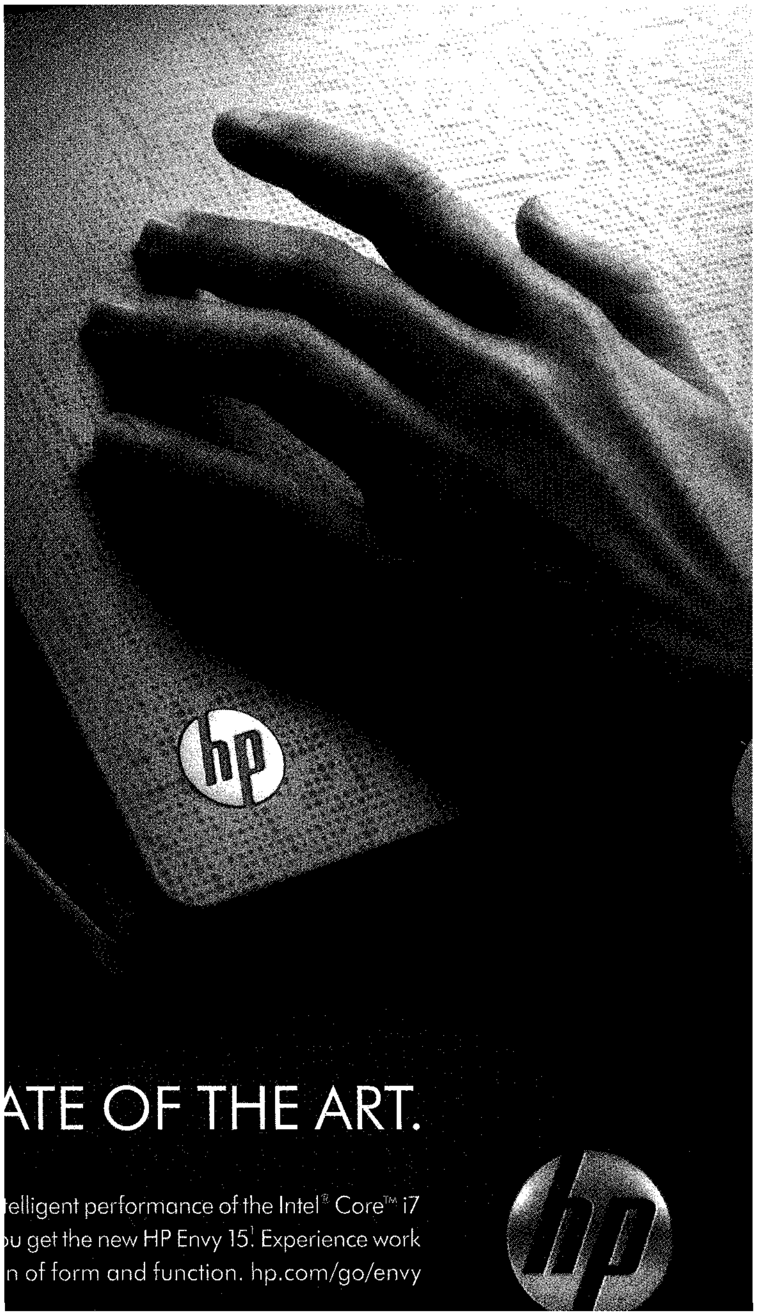
MOVIES OPENING

ACT OF GOD
This documentary, by Jennifer Baichwal, explores the effects of being hit by lightning. Opening Nov. 4. (IFC Center.)

THE BOX
A science-fiction fantasy, directed by Richard Kelly, about a box that makes its bearers instantly rich but kills someone they know. Starring Cameron Diaz, James Marsden, and Frank Langella. Opening Nov. 6. (In wide release.)

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
An animated version of the Dickens tale, with the voices of Jim Carrey, Gary Oldman, and Robin Wright Penn. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Opening Nov. 6. (In wide release.)

COLLAPSE
A documentary, directed by Chris Smith, about a man who argues that industrial civilization is on the verge of a catastrophic breakdown. Opening Nov. 6. (Angelika Film Center.)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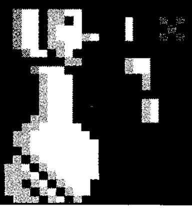

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LA DANSE
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Nov. 4. (Film Forum.)

ENDGAME
In this drama, set in South Africa in the nineteen-eighties, a government representative (William Hurt) begins secret negotiations with the imprisoned Nelson Mandela (Chiwetel Ejiofor). Directed by Pete Travis. Opening Nov. 6. (Quad Cinema.)

THE FOURTH KIND
A science-fiction thriller about U.F.O. sightings in Alaska. Directed by Olatunde Osunsanmi; starring Milla Jovovich, Will Patton, and Elias Koteas. Opening Nov. 6. (In wide release.)

THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 6. (In limited release.)

PRECIOUS: BASED ON THE NOVEL "PUSH" BY SAPPHIRE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 6. (In wide release.)

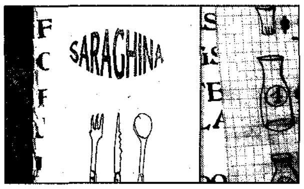
THAT EVENING SUN
A drama, directed by Scott Teems, about a Tennessee man (Hal Holbrook) whose farm has been rented out to his lifelong enemy. Opening Nov. 6. (In limited release.)

NOW PLAYING

AMELIA
Hilary Swank, as Amelia Earhart, has a big, toothy smile, high cheekbones, and short, irregular hair that seems to have been chopped by a butcher knife. Earhart's clothes—the men's pants, shirts, and leather flying jackets—perfectly fit Swank's lean, small-hipped body. Looking at her elongated sprawl and lope, we can see why Earhart's androgynous style became chic. Swank is fine, yet it's not an exciting performance, and, the way the movie has been conceived, it can't be. The director, Mira Nair, and the screenwriters, Ronald Bass and Anna Hamilton Phelan, frame their bio-pic with Earhart's doomed last flight, in 1937, but the accumulated personal and social detail in the middle of the movie lacks any great interest, and Nair's direction is rhythmless and placid. With Richard Gere, as the publishing heir and public-relations whiz George Putnam, who packages Earhart into a national celebrity and then marries her, and Ewan McGregor, as the aeronautics executive Gene Vidal, with whom she has an affair. The filmmakers' treatment of the affair is so tame that, bizarrely, seventy-five years after the fact, they appear eager to protect Earhart from scandal even as they're publicizing her secret love life. The handsome cinematography, in conventional *National Geographic* style, is by Stuart Dryburgh. The old airplanes, including a Lockheed Vega 5B, which looks like a fat bumblebee, are the most stirring sights in the movie.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/2/09.) (In wide release.)

ANTICHRIST
What are we meant to do with the new film from Lars von Trier? Stare in wonderment, stare in horror, throw up, walk out, or laugh? Each response will have its adherents, and von Trier hasn't lost his talent for dividing an audience. Whether he can any longer tell a story without sliding off the rails is another matter. Consider his latest plot, in which a nameless married couple (Charlotte Gainsbourg and Willem Dafoe) lose a child when he wanders out of a window while they are having sex; in an effort to confront and assuage their grief, they head for a cabin in the woods, where the wife chooses to express her feelings by the slightly unorthodox means of genital mutilation. This is done both actively and passively; it repels on purpose, but, worse still, it grabs all the attention and wrecks any sense of balance in the movie—a shame, because von Trier, until now, has probed with a calmer intensity the desires that follow bereavement. He has also, in league with his director of photography, Anthony Dod Mantle, conjured all manner of startling and spectral images; ironically, the film is at its best when it swerves away from adult material and ventures into the fairy-tale landscapes of a child.—*Anthony Lane* (10/26/09) (In limited release.)

TABLES FOR TWO
SARAGHINA



JESSIE WENDER

435 Halsey St., Brooklyn (718-574-0010)—In Fellini's "8½," Saraghina is the wild-eyed, frizzy-haired whore who dances a grotesque rumba for a gaggle of schoolboys. This restaurant, in Bedford-Stuyvesant, is considerably more seductive. (It was designed by the wife of one of the owners; the family lives down the block.) Dozens of candles illuminate whitewashed walls and an array of eclectic objets—dusty bowling pins and apothecary bottles, water-stained mid-century cooking guides, road signs that point toward vanished summer resorts. A pile of firewood teeters near the front door, en route to the blazing pizza oven. A tearaway calendar, courtesy of Smedley Bros. Lumber-Millwork, is stuck four days after Christmas, 1961. If you ignore the view out the windows—a fertility clinic, a bodega, and a fluorescent-lit Chinese takeaway spot with the hopeful name Fun Chow—you might imagine that you're spending an autumn evening at an invitingly decrepit lake house, full of the accumulated ephemera of a family to which you wish you belonged.

Saraghina has been justly lauded for its Neapolitan-style pies, but it would be a mistake to lump it with the city's new crop of hoity-toity pizzerias. Indeed, Saraghina is that rarest of species, a serious restaurant that doesn't take itself too seriously. In addition to the pizzas—the best is the capocollo, laden with fiery neck-meat ham—there are a dozen or so nightly specials, each typically excellent and suitable for sharing. With a crowd of one's intimates, it's prudent to order one of everything and several carafes of the house red. (The prices encourage indulgence.) Fish is prepared with particular expertise; grilled octopus, served in a piquant tomato-and-celery salad, was pleasantly unrubbery, mussels tasted so fresh and simple that they might have been steamed in seawater, and a surprisingly flaky swordfish made an ideal foil for the crisp green beans on the side. Another highlight was the dish of burrata cheese, which (locavores be warned) arrives weekly by plane from Puglia. To get the freshest serving, plan a late-week supper. This helpful tip comes by way of the chef and co-owner, Edoardo Mantelli, who daylights as a partner at the posh clothing label Tocca. At Saraghina, Mantelli often saunters out of the kitchen to greet his guests, and, in the event that any pizza has been neglected on your table, he may offer advice on freezing and reheating the leftovers. Of course, he said recently, shrugging and smiling, you could always just eat it cold from the fridge. "That's what I do at home." (Open daily for dinner and weekends for brunch. Pizzas $10-$18; dishes $8-$15.)

—*Lila Byock*

LA DANSE

Frederick Wiseman, in this documentary portrait of the Paris Opera Ballet, haunts the stairways, rehearsal rooms, and watery subterranean corridors of the Palais Garnier (the Ballet's home), and we feel that we have become, with him, phantoms of the opera. The Ballet is an enormous organism at the center of which is the artistic and administrative head, the tentacular Brigitte Lefèvre, a brisk, authoritative woman, manipulative as hell. With evident pleasure, Wiseman turns back to the choreographers and dancers, whom he photographs not in the manner of the commercial cinema, where bodies are broken up into threshing limbs, but in full frame, top to bottom, with space around them, so we can see the incredible things they are capable of as well as, inevitably, their mistakes, missteps, and gradual improvements. So many of Wiseman's films have been about institutions that didn't work well, or that merely penned up the broken-down Americans who fall off the tracks of economic and physical success. It's a joyous experience to see an institution in full flower—to see not dysfunction and dereliction but the many forms of striving and virtue.—*D.D.* (11/2/09) (Film Forum.)

AN EDUCATION

Peter Sarsgaard gives his best performance yet as David Goldman, a London hustler of enormous charm who zips around town in a maroon sports car, and who seduces, slowly and patiently, a very bright sixteen-year-old girl—Jenny (Carey Mulligan), a student from suburban Twickenham who is hemmed in by her cautious parents and her school and is rather too easily dazzled by champagne, a few dinner clubs, and a weekend in Paris. Based on a short memoir by the talented, acid-tongued journalist Lynn Barber (first published in *Granta*), the movie is set in 1962, when England was gradually emerging from postwar austerities and the fabled antics of swinging London were just getting under way. Mulligan is self-possessed, but what makes the movie unusual is the strange innocence of Sarsgaard's seducer: David is a liar and a swindler, but he is as eager as Jenny is for pleasures of every kind—he enjoys them as if for the first time. The novelist Nick Hornby did the adaptation; the director, Lone Scherfig, born in Denmark, is alive to the social nuances of class and money in England. With Emma Thompson as a formidable, stupid, anti-Semitic schoolmistress.—*D.D.* (10/19/09) (In wide release.)

GENTLEMEN BRONCOS

Compared with this wildly inventive, audacious, and genre-swirling comedy, the director Jared Hess's first two films, "Napoleon Dynamite" and "Nacho Libre," are models of narrative sobriety. The story is straightforward enough: Benjamin (Michael Angarano), a lonely teen-ager being homeschooled by his poor single mother (Jennifer Coolidge) in a dome-shaped house somewhere west of the Rockies, salves his soul by writing and illustrating whacked-out science-fiction fantasies. When he enters one in a story contest, his idol, the popular novelist Ronald Chevalier (Jemaine Clement), passes it off as his own and turns it into a best-seller. Meanwhile, two threadbare local filmmakers (Halley Feiffer and Hector Jimenez) also get hold of the property. Astonishingly, Hess turns this fable-like premise into a juvenile but grand-scale vision of earth and Heaven. The small and pious town is filled with Boschlike grotesques and jolting details (such as a store's lingerie department's facing the gun counter), but it's transfigured by Hess's parallel worlds: Chevalier's supercilious version of Benjamin's story and the teen filmmakers' cheesy one are set against cosmic, transcendent—and ridiculously jejune—scenes from Benjamin's own imagination. The events are superintended by a stranger dressed in white: Dusty (Mike White, who also co-produced), Benjamin's guardian angel. Hess, who is from a Mormon community, blends local color with celestial inspiration to create a forthright and original religious vision matched by few films, whether dramatic or comic.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

HATARI!

The title means "danger" in Swahili, and Howard Hawks's African adventure, from 1962, starts out with a trapper being gored by a rhinoceros, but these big-game hunters' real prey—and their menace—is the opposite sex. The sprawling, good-humored, episodic story concerns a motley international group of freelance huntsmen (and their boss, a young woman) led by a hot-tempered Irishman, Sean Mercer (John Wayne), who are thrown into emotional disarray when a woman photographer (Elsa Martinelli) shows up. As ever with Hawks, the local politics are nothing (though the roughhousing young actors Gérard Blain and Hardy Krüger serve up a comic allegory of Franco-German reconciliation) and the subtleties of sexual psychology are everything, as suggested by the dazzling wealth of innuendo. The tone is set early on when Krüger, standing close behind the French actress Michèle Girardon and zipping up her dress, says he's "afraid of ripping something." There's plenty of drinking, joshing, fighting, and intimate maneuvering, and the remarkable scenes of animal trapping, filmed on location with the actors involved, make for exciting diversions. A woman-hunting elephant provides a Freudian jolt, set to Henry Mancini's jaunty music, and Red Buttons is impressive as a Brooklyn cabdriver in exile whose heart does a U-turn.—*R.B.* (BAM; Nov. 4.)

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY

In this creep-o-rama, a San Diego couple believe that their house is haunted and set up a video camera in search of proof. The film, which was shot more than directed by Oren Peli, uses its minuscule fifteen-thousand-dollar budget to good effect; the grainy images and direct sound heighten the suspense. There is not much to look at, but this failing, paradoxically, holds the attention. Peli understands that the root of true fear is in waiting for something to happen. A close inspection might reveal the movie's many flaws, but, as a communal scare experience, it's as enjoyable as a visit to a spook house.—*Bruce Diones* (In limited release.)

A SERIOUS MAN

The Coen brothers in their black, bleak, belittling mode, and, except for a few moments, it's hell to sit through. The movie, set in a Minneapolis suburb in 1967, is a deadpan farce about middle-class bad taste (Jewish division), with a schlemiel Job as its hero—Professor Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg), a physicist at a local university whose life is falling apart.

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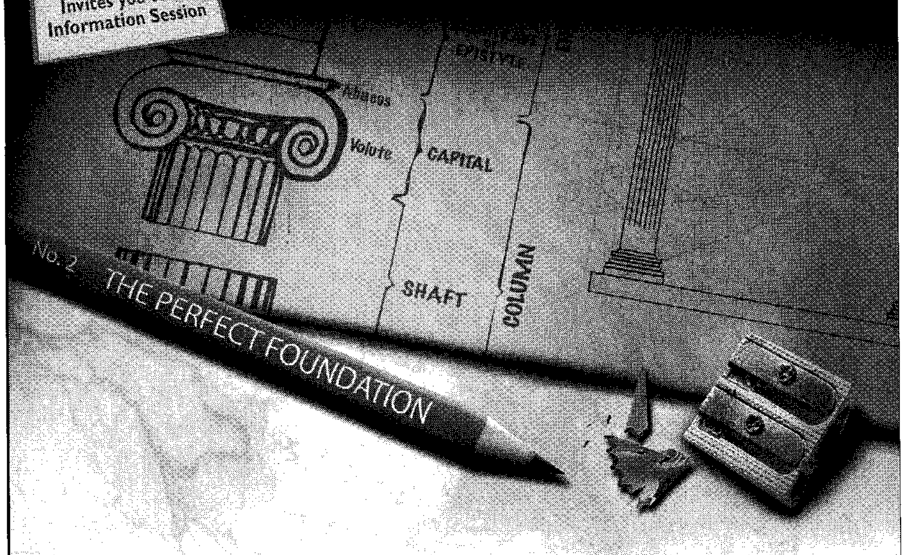

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Gopnik's wife (Sari Lennick) is leaving him for a sanctimonious bastard (Fred Melamed) who covers his aggressions against Larry with limp-pawed caresses and offers of "understanding." Larry's kids are thieving brats, and his sick, whining brother (Richard Kind) camps out on the living-room couch and refuses to look for work. There's more, much more, including a series of mishaps, sordid betrayals, and weird coincidences, but Larry, a sweet guy and "a serious man"—upright, a good teacher, a caring father—won't hit back. One wonders what kind of revenge the Coens are enacting; whatever indignities they suffered as teens, they can't have been much affected by them as grownups. Shot with mainly local actors in a super-hard-focus style by Roger Deakins. As a work of film craftsmanship, the movie is fascinating; in every other way, it's insufferable.—*D.D.* (10/5/09) (In wide release.)

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

A key aspect of Jean-Luc Godard's genius is that he's always in the right place at the right time, which, in June, 1968, was the London recording studio where the Rolling Stones were cutting—and transforming—their satanic anthem. The restrained tracking shots of the band at work preserved the event for the ages while reflecting its importance as a blankly aggressive pop happening. The other half of the film, with which the studio footage is intercut, highlights the politics of the day, which Godard presents with a blend of hectoring rhetoric and symbolic set pieces—notably the concluding one, in which his wife at the time, Anne Wiazemsky, plays a corpse hoisted aloft on a camera crane, as if punished for a less than total commitment to the revolution. Such scenes—including those in which Black Power activists kidnap, molest, and execute white women—reflect Godard's fevered vision of the times. But his filming of the Stones shows that the music *was* the revolution, and embodies the virtue of all great documentaries: that of revealing more than the filmmaker planned to tell.—*R.B.* (IFC Center; Nov. 4-5.)

THE TOUCH

The eternal triangle, 1971 style, done to a turn by Ingmar Bergman. Elliott Gould stars as David, a Jewish bull in a Swedish china shop. A German refugee, raised in New York and educated in Israel, he arrives in a rustic village to work on an archeological dig and meets Karin (Bibi Andersson), a starchy doctor's frustrated wife. The two begin a fierce, desperate affair. The passionate and willful David enlivens—even in his bursts of violence—the orderly chill of Karin's domestic rounds, yet, when her staid husband (Max von Sydow) compels her to make a choice, she is paralyzed between duty and the abyss. Bergman's prowling camera pursues the characters in their most vulnerable moments; his highly inflected, painfully intimate closeups offer little explanation of their outer circumstances but serve to bare their souls. The harsh contrasts of the movie's rich, painterly color scheme—pitting the crisp, clean whiteness of home against the musky green walls of the love nest, and the swarthiness of Gould's dark-bearded behemoth against the Swedish couple's papery pallor—are imprints of the characters' tormented inner lives. In Swedish and English.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Nov. 6 and Nov. 8.)

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

After a strong beginning, Spike Jonze's live-action adaptation of Maurice Sendak's children's classic runs into the sands. Max (Max Records), an angry nine-year-old boy, bites his mother (Catherine Keener), runs out of the house, and joins the creatures—snouted, horned, clawed, furry—on a mysterious island. "Let the wild rumpus start!" he shouts, and they all run and jump, bash each other, and fall down in a heap, with Max happily buried among them. Jonze was right to use actors in elaborate suits (designed by Jim Henson's company) rather than fully animated figures. Most of the movements are weighted, rather than slickly virtuosic or glib. But after the opening scenes the movie turns unbearably melancholy. The creatures have mysterious relations with one another—friendships, love affairs, and long-standing grudges. They throw jealous fits or walk off in a huff, and we don't know where the hurt feelings are coming from or where they are going; after a while, the wild things sound like peevish adults elbowing one another out of the way at the Zabar's smoked-fish counter. The movie seems to be less about liberation than about futility. The creatures are voiced by James Gandolfini, Forest Whitaker, Chris Cooper, Paul Dano, and Catherine O'Hara. Screenplay by Jonze and Dave Eggers.—*D.D.* (10/19/09) (In wide release.)

YOU CANNOT START WITHOUT ME—VALERY GERGIEV, MAESTRO

Allan Miller's documentary portrait of the artistic director of the Mariinsky (formerly Kirov) Opera and Ballet, in St. Petersburg, the principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, and a guest conductor everywhere else does not solve the question that has puzzled music lovers for two decades: How does Gergiev do everything he does? There's no definitive accounting for physical and spiritual energy like this. But it's clear from the interviews that Miller mixes in with rehearsal and performance footage that Gergiev sees himself as the heir to Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Shostakovich, and other great Russian composers. Working with the London Symphony on Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," he groans, roars, and coos; he's very precise about tiny details of coloration, and the players seem awed—they're getting their Russianness from the ground up. With his heavy eyebrows and perpetual dark stubble, Gergiev's appearance is the furthest remove from the voluptuous elegance of the white-maned Bernstein or von Karajan. This conductor looks like a thug. His mode of expression (in wonderful English) is often soulful, yet the movie, though conventional in form, brings us close to an elemental ferocity just barely held in check.—*D.D.* (11/2/09) (Symphony Space.)

Also Playing

KILLING KASZTNER: In limited release. **THE MAID:** In limited release. **SKIN:** Sunshine Cinema.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Roger Corman. Nov. 4 at 7:15: "The Intruder" (1962). ♦ Nov. 4 at 9:15, Nov. 6 at 9, and Nov. 7 at 7: "X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes" (1963). ♦ Nov. 5 at 7 and Nov. 7 at 9: "The St. Valentine's Day Massacre" (1967). ♦ Nov. 5 at 9:15 and Nov. 8 at 3:30: "The Wild Angels" (1966). ♦ Nov. 6 at 7:30 and Nov. 8 at 5:30: "A Bucket of Blood" (1959). ♦ Nov. 7 at 5 and Nov. 8 at 8:45: "Bloody Mama" (1970). ♦ Nov. 8 at 7: "The Little Shop of Horrors" (1960).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"1962: New York Film Critics Circle." Nov. 4 at 6:15 and 9:30: "Hatari!" (†). The 6:15 screening will be introduced by Joshua Rothkopf. ♦ Nov. 5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Shoot the Piano Player" (1960, François Truffaut; in French). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by David Fear. ♦ Nov. 6 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Jules and Jim" (1962, Truffaut; in French). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by Kyle Smith. ♦ Nov. 7 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Cleo from 5 to 7" (1962, Agnès Varda; in French). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by Dana Stevens. ♦ Nov. 9 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Il Grido" (1957, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian). ♦ In revival. Nov. 8 at 6:30 and 9:15: "Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)" ("Every Man for Himself") (1980, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"Halloween Gruesome Twosome." Nov. 4-5 at 1, 4:35, and 8:10: "Scream of Fear" (1961, Seth Holt). ♦ Nov. 4-5 at 2:35, 6:10, and 9:45: "Theatre of Blood" (1973, Douglas Hickox). ♦ In revival. Nov. 4-5 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "On the Waterfront" (1954, Elia Kazan). ♦ Nov. 6-19 at 1, 3:45, 7, and 9:35: "The Red Shoes" (1948, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger). The 7 P.M. screening on Nov. 6 will be introduced by Thelma Schoonmaker, Powell's widow.

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Italian Neo-Realism." All films are in Italian. Nov. 4 at 1:30: "Outcry" (1946, Aldo Vergano). ♦ Nov. 4 at 3:20 and Nov. 8 at 7: "Shoeshine"

(1946, Vittorio De Sica). ♦ Nov. 5 at 2:30 and 6:15: "The Bandit" (1946, Alberto Lattuada). ♦ Nov. 5 at 4:15 and Nov. 7 at 5: "The Tragic Pursuit" (1947, Giuseppe De Santis). ♦ Nov. 6 at 2 and 6:20: "Paisan" (1946, Roberto Rossellini). ♦ Nov. 6 at 4:30 and 8:45: "To Live in Peace" (1947, Luigi Zampa). ♦ Nov. 7 at 6:50 and Nov. 8 at 5: "Without Pity" (1948, Lattuada). ♦ Nov. 7 at 8:45 and Nov. 10 at 3: "Bicycle Thieves" (1948, De Sica). ♦ Nov. 8 at 7 and Nov. 10 at 1: "In the Name of the Law" (1949, Pietro Germi). ♦ Nov. 9 at 2 and 6:15: "Under the Sun of Rome" (1948, Renato Castellani). ♦ Nov. 9 at 4 and 8:15: "Heaven Over the Marshes" (1949, Augusto Genina).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 22: The films of François Truffaut. Nov. 10 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Wild Child" (1970; in French). The 7:30 screening will be introduced by the film critic Elliot Stein.

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screenings. Nov. 4-5 at 3:30 and 8:45: "Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out!" (1969/2009, Bradley Kaplan, Ian Markiewicz, and Albert Maysles) and "Sympathy for the Devil" (†). ♦ Nov. 6-8 at 11 A.M.: "Atomic Café" (1982, Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, and Pierce Rafferty). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Nov. 6-7: "The Meaning of Life" (1983, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Nov. 10 at 8: "Copyright Criminals" (2009, Benjamin Franzen and Kembrew McLeod).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Nov. 4-6 at 1:30: "Judith of Bethulia" (1914, D. W. Griffith; silent) and "The Avenging Conscience" (1914, Griffith; silent). ♦ Through Jan. 2: "Nuts and Bolts: Machine Made Man in Films from the Collection." Nov. 4 at 4: "Metropolis" (1927, Fritz Lang; silent). ♦ Nov. 8 at 1: "The Golem" (1920, Paul Wegener and Carl Boese; silent) and "The Golem" (1995, Robert Ascher). ♦ "To Save and Project." Nov. 4 at 4:30: "Christine of the Big Tops" (1926, Archie Mayo; silent), preceded by three short films by Margaret Conneely. ♦ Nov. 4 at 7 and Nov. 5 at 4: "Mor Vran" (1930, Jean Epstein; in French) and "The Seafarers" (1953, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Nov. 5 at 7: "The Housemaid" (1960, Kim Ki-Young; in Korean). ♦ Nov. 6 at 7 and Nov. 8 at 5:30: "The Touch" (†) and "Ingmar Bergman" (1972, Stig Björkman; in Swedish). ♦ Nov. 7 at 8: "The Phantom Chariot" (1931, Victor Sjöström; silent). ♦ Nov. 8 at 2:30: "Häxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages" (1922, Benjamin Christensen; silent).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Nov. 6 at 9:30: "The Tales of Hoffmann" (1951, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger), introduced by Thelma Schoonmaker, Powell's widow.

READINGS AND TALKS

"POLISH POETRY NOW"
The poets Tadeusz Dabrowski, Bozena Keff, Marzanna Kielar, and Tomasz Rozycki are joined by the translators Bill Johnston and Benjamin Paloff for a reading and discussion. (Poets House, 10 River Terrace, Battery Park City. 212-431-7920. Nov. 3-4 at 7.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
The translator Esther Allen, the novelists Michael Cunningham and Darryl Pinckney, the critic Greil Marcus, and Wendy Lesser, the editor of *Threepenny Review*, celebrate the tenth anniversary of N.Y.R.B. Classics, a book-publishing arm of *The New York Review of Books*. (Berger Forum, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-930-0800. Nov. 5 at 7.)

ELIZABETH PEYTON
The painter discusses her work. (School of Visual Arts Theatre, 333 W. 23rd St. 212-592-2010. Nov. 5 at 7.)

GREENLIGHT BOOKSTORE
Jonathan Lethem is currently engaged in a marathon reading—eight nights spread out over seven weeks—of his entire new novel, "Chronic City." He started earlier this month, and will be exactly midway through when he returns to the undertaking at this Fort Greene bookstore. (686 Fulton St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. Nov. 5 at 7:30.)

"IAC POETRYFEST 2009"
The Irish Arts Center's inaugural festival of contemporary Irish poetry features Harry Clifton, Paula Meehan, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Peter Sirr, Joseph Woods, and Enda Wyley. (553 W. 51st St. 212-868-4444. Nov. 7, starting at 3.)

"THE VOYAGE OUT"
In honor of the two-hundredth anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth, and of the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the first presentation to scientists of his theory of evolution, the composer John Morton and the artist Jacqueline Shatz have built a miniature interactive musical version of Darwin's ship the Beagle, which plays, through wall-mounted speakers, computer-manipulated versions of the song of the Galapagos mockingbird and Darwin's finches; recitations of Darwin's packing lists and field notes; and nautical sounds such as that of an anchor being hoisted out of the water. The installation is up Nov. 5-29, and on Nov. 8 at 1 its creators will be on hand to discuss the work. (Wave Hill, W. 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. 718-549-3200.)

IDLEWILD BOOKS
Twenty years and one day after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Poland's Dorota Maslowska, Russia's

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Masha Gessen, and Germany's Kathrin Aehnlich read from their contributions to the new anthology "The Wall in My Head." (12 W. 19th St. No tickets necessary, but, to reserve a seat, send an e-mail to events@idlewildbooks.com. Nov. 10 at 7.)

ORHAN PAMUK
The novelist reads from and discusses with Leonard Lopate his latest work, "The Museum of Innocence." (Queens College, LeFrak Concert Hall, the Music Building, Flushing. Nov. 10 at 7:30. For more information, visit www.qc.edu/readings.)

92ND STREET Y
The poet and writer David Lehman discusses his new book, "A Fine Romance: Jewish Songwriters, American Songs," a history of the Great American Songbook. He'll be joined by the pianist Jonathan Breit and the vocalists Thomas Dolan, Hannah Oberman-Breindel, and Megan Stern. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Nov. 10 at 8:15.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

PERFORMING REVOLUTION FESTIVAL
This five-month-long festival of music, dance, theatre, and other events, starting Nov. 6, featuring artists from Central and Eastern Europe, celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the fall of Communism. (See Night Life—(Le) Poisson Rouge.) (For a complete schedule, visit www.performingrevolution.org.)

MARIO BATALI FOUNDATION
Following a screening of the new animated Wes Anderson film, "Fantastic Mr. Fox," the chef Batali (who lends his voice to a character in the film) joins the children's-music wizard Dan Zanes for a benefit party. (Tribeca Cinemas, 54 Varick St. For more information, visit www.mariobatalifoundation.org. Nov. 8 at 12:15.)

BROOKLYN BEEFSTEAK
The Beefsteak, a typically boisterous gathering centered on the ritualistic consumption of tenderloin and other cuts of red meat, was a popular way for New York City politicians to raise money and secure votes in the first part of the last century. (It was immortalized by Joseph Mitchell in a 1939 article in these pages, and still lives on in, of all places, New Jersey.) Now it returns to Brooklyn, which, according to the organizers of this non-political event, hasn't seen one in a hundred years. There will be music, and beer will be available, but, as custom dictates, knives, forks, and other utensils will not. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. Nov. 8, from 3 to 6.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Some of the gloom seems to have lifted from the auction world, with London's October sales of postwar art meeting (relatively modest) expectations. Now it's New York's turn. **Sotheby's** faces the challenge confidently with an evening sale of Impressionist and modern art (Nov. 4), led by a late Picasso ("Buste d'Homme," a seated figure wearing a fetching yellow hat) and a Giacometti sculpture of an off-kilter figure, "L'Homme Qui Chavire." For those seeking sterling provenance, there are six works from the collection of the late Arthur M. Sackler, including a striking Bauhaus-period Kandinsky, "Krass und Mild," as well as several topnotch canvases—by the likes of Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley—from the collection of the family of Paul Durand-Ruel, the legendary Parisian dealer who championed the Impressionists. A day sale follows on Nov. 5. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ After its evening sale on Nov. 3, **Christie's** will hold two more auctions of Impressionist and modern art (Nov. 4), opening in the morning with works on paper and concluding in the afternoon with lower-priced paintings and sculptures (including a totemic late Miró figure, "Tête et Oiseau"). The big evening auction of postwar and contemporary art (Nov. 10) encompasses several works from the collection of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, including one of Rauschenberg's famous Black Paintings ("No. 1"), as well as a shimmering canvas inspired by Merce's dancers, "Dancers on a Plane, Merce Cunningham," from 1981. And there are even bigger lots: a multi-panel frieze by Basquiat, "Brother Sausage," and two paintings from Warhol's "Death and Disaster" series (1962-64)—"Tunafish Disaster," a prefiguring of recent cases of industrial food poisoning, and "Most Wanted Men No. 3, Ellis Ruiz B.," an evocation of our current obsession with predatory criminals. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ This week, the Park Avenue Armory will be taken over by the annual **IFPDA Print Fair** (Nov. 5-8), organized by the International Fine Print Dealers Association. More than eighty dealers from the U.S., Canada, and Europe will take part, exhibiting everything from medieval woodcuts to conceptual art. (Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-674-6095.) ♦ Timed to coincide with the opening of the fair, **Swann** will hold a sale of prints on Nov. 5, a survey spanning everything from Old Masters to twentieth-century works, and a private collection of prints (including images by Tiepolo, Goya, Braque, and Pollock) on Nov. 9. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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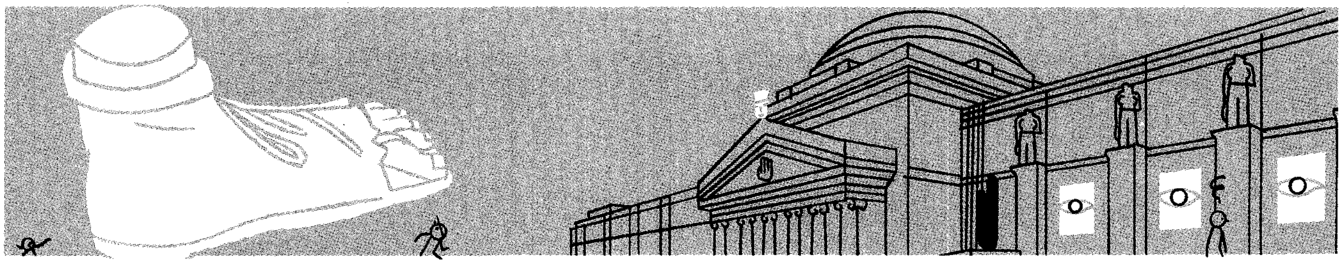
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
IN THEIR SIXTIES
Nov. 17-19

Two titans of the radical sixties, Deborah Hay and Yvonne Rainer, both alumnae of the Judson Dance Theatre, have lately returned to group choreography. They unite for a double bill at Baryshnikov Arts Center. (212-868-4444.)

ART
IN GOOD PART
Nov. 19-Oct. 2, 2011

A giant foot, carved from marble as an offering to the god Serapis, and an eye made of crystalline limestone, blue glass, and obsidian, which once graced the face of a coffin, are two of the thirty-five objects in "Body Parts: Ancient Egyptian Fragments and Amulets," an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum focussing on figurative realism. (718-501-6331.)

NIGHT LIFE
WHIRLWIND
Nov. 22

The wild, shaggy, deliberately eccentric California folk-rock sensation Devendra Banhart recently released his sixth studio album, "What Will We Be." Later this month, he brings the band that backed him on the record, which was co-produced by Paul Butler, of the U.K.'s Band of Bees, to Town Hall. (800-745-3000.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
EASTERN STANDARD
Nov. 23

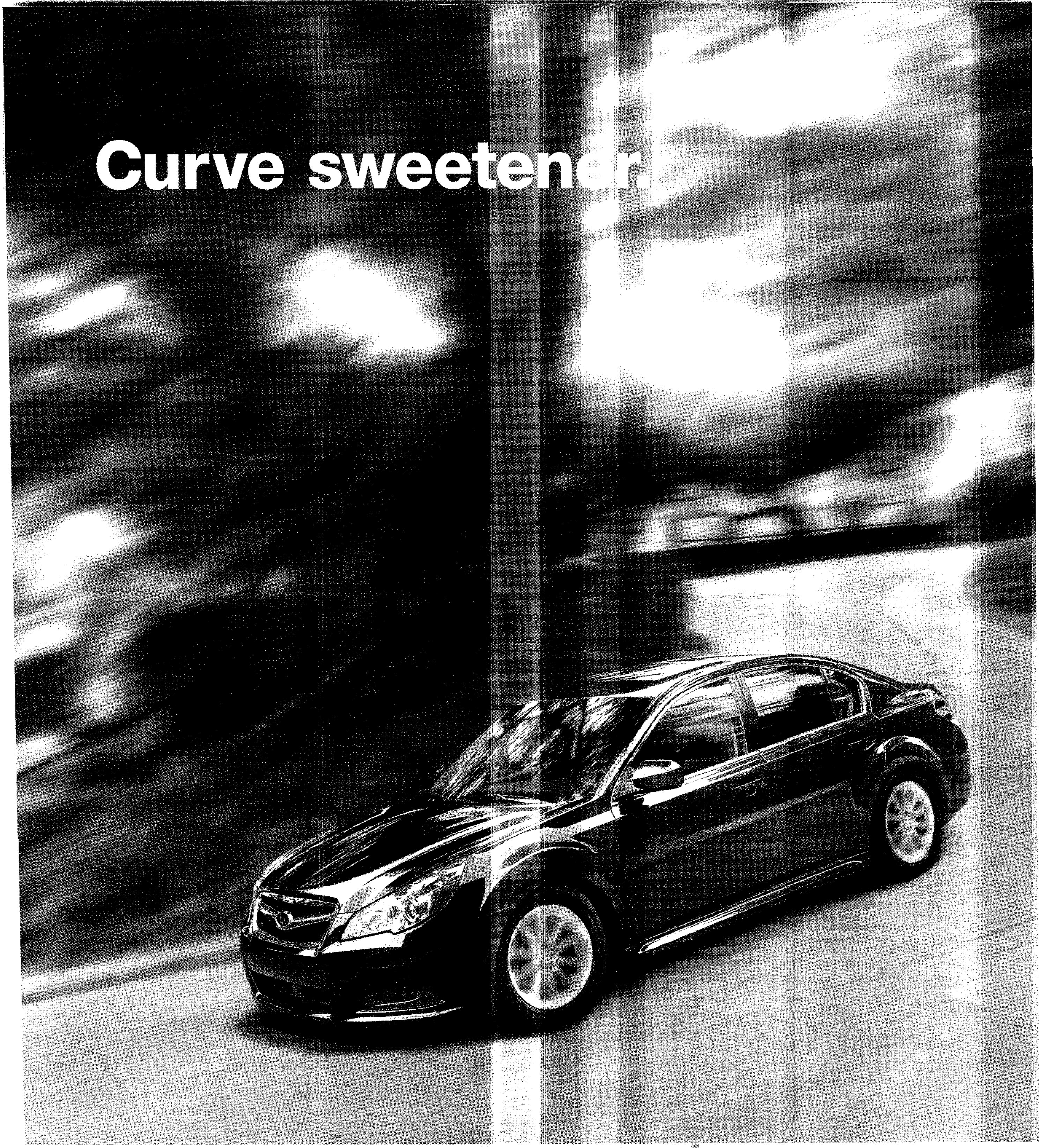
(Le) Poisson Rouge, with a keen awareness of the divide in the classical-music world (and in the record business as well), hosts "Chants d'Est," a concert by the cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton, in which she offers music from her eponymous album, an ardent exploration of folk and classical music from Eastern Europe. (www.lprnyc.com.)

MOVIES
LIV IN BROOKLYN
Nov. 24-Dec. 7

In conjunction with Liv Ullmann's staging of "A Streetcar Named Desire," BAM offers a retrospective of her great acting career, including a quartet of classic films by Ingmar Bergman: "Persona," "Shame," "Hour of the Wolf," and "Scenes from a Marriage." (718-636-4100.)

Egyptian art at the Brooklyn Museum.

LAURENT CILLUFFO



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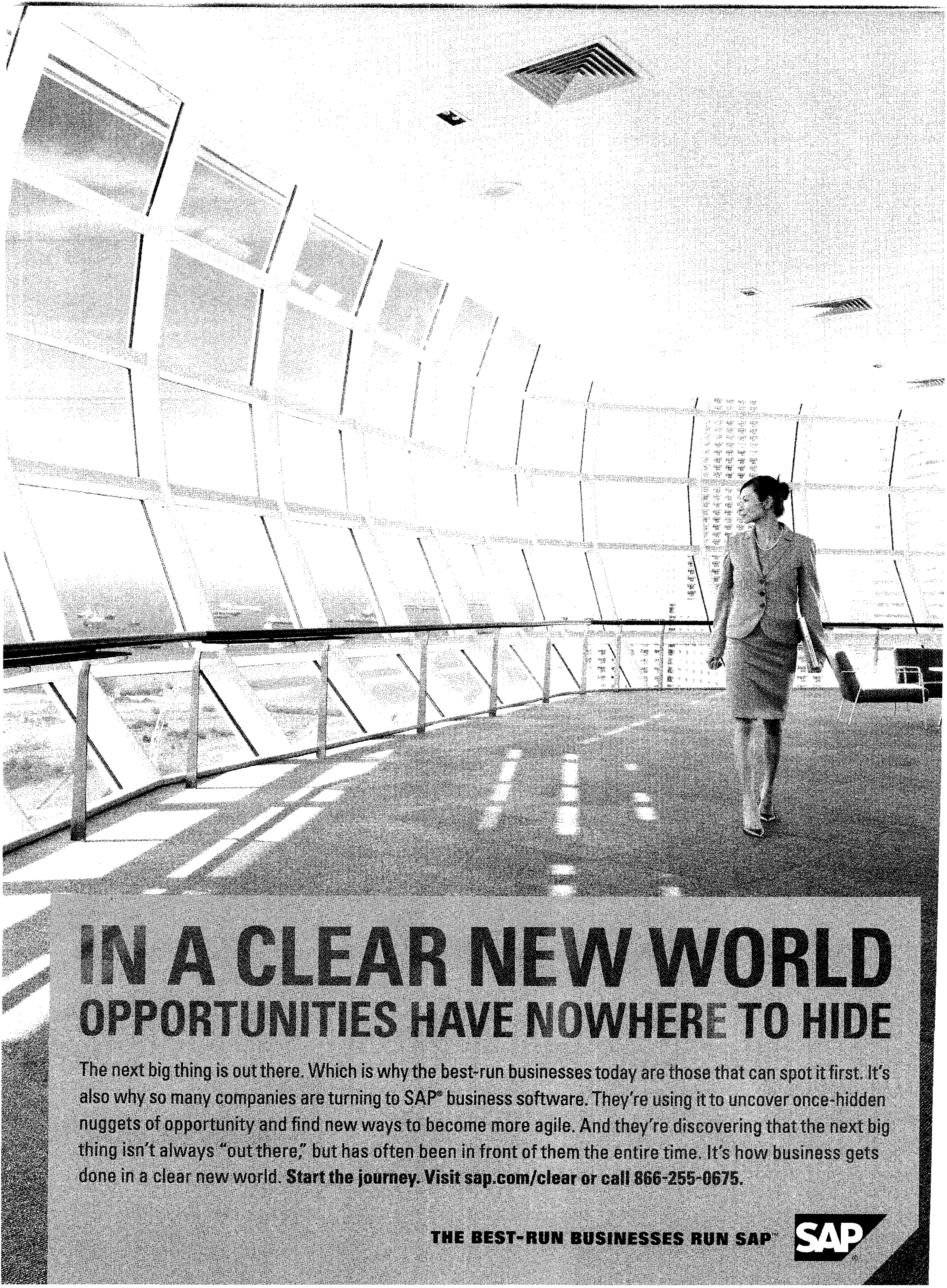

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THE NEW YORKER

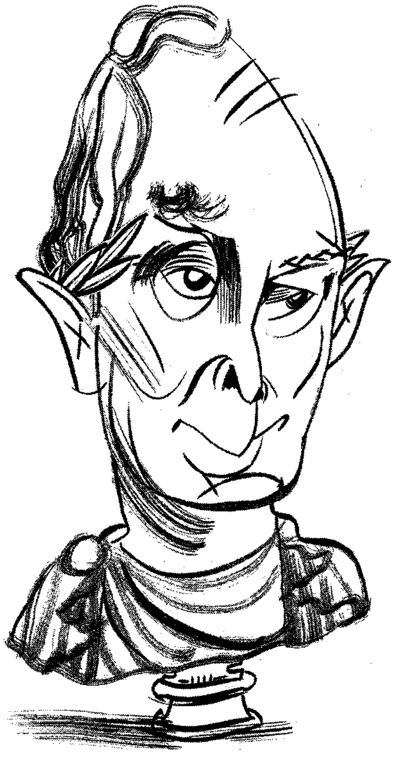
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
BIGGUS BUCKUS

> Reg [at a meeting of the People's Front of Judea]: All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?
>
> Attendee: Brought peace?
>
> —*"Monty Python's Life of Brian."*

One of the most successful politicians of the first century before the Christian era was Marcus Licinius Crassus, who was reputedly not only the richest man in Rome but also, by one accounting, the eighth-richest man who has ever lived. His fortune was pegged (by Pliny the Elder) at upward of two hundred million sesterces. Most of those millions were in real estate, some of it acquired in a manner strikingly like the operations of health-insurance companies a couple of millennia later. Crassus had his own private fire department, and if your house caught fire his representatives would offer to buy it on the spot, at a one-time-only, fire-sale price that would fall rapidly as the flames climbed. If you said yes, you'd get a few sesterces, after which Crassus' firefighters would do their thing. If you said no, you'd end up with a pile of ashes. (No public option being available, few owners were in a position to quibble.)

"Rome had in very truth become the city where everything was for sale," the classicist Edith Hamilton wrote. Crassus eagerly deployed his wealth in the service of his political ambitions. He funded charitable enterprises, used interest-free loans to put influential citizens in his debt, provided the less affluent with sustenance, and peopled his payroll with the best political operatives money could buy. He eventually got himself elected consul, the city's highest office, in which, the chroniclers tell us, he did a perfectly adequate job. Crassus may not have had Pompey's military genius or Caesar's supreme eloquence, but he was not without political talent. According to Plutarch, Romans "looked upon him as a diligent and careful man, ready to help and succor his fellow-citizens. Besides, the people were pleased with his courteous and unpretending salutations and greetings, for he never met any citizen, however humble and low, but he returned him his salute by name." On the other hand, the great historian notes, "the many virtues of Crassus were darkened by the one vice of avarice." But without the avarice he wouldn't have had the money, and without the money he wouldn't have had the consulship. Or a prime spot in "Plutarch's Lives."



Even by the differing standards of their respective eras, Michael Bloomberg is a nicer guy than Marcus Crassus. It's hard to imagine Mayor Mike crucifying six thousand miscreants up and down the length of Broadway, as his Roman counterpart did to Spartacus' defeated rebels along the Via Appia. But there's no denying that our esteemed mayor (and he is esteemed) is a very rich man who is where he has been for the past eight years, and where he will remain for the next four—City Hall—because, like Crassus, he's as rich as Croesus. How rich? Well, according to the latest *Forbes* 400 list, Michael Bloomberg's net worth is $17.5 billion. That's shorthand for seventeen thousand five hundred million dollars. That's a stack of hundred-dollar bills twelve miles high.

Bloomberg isn't the eighth-richest

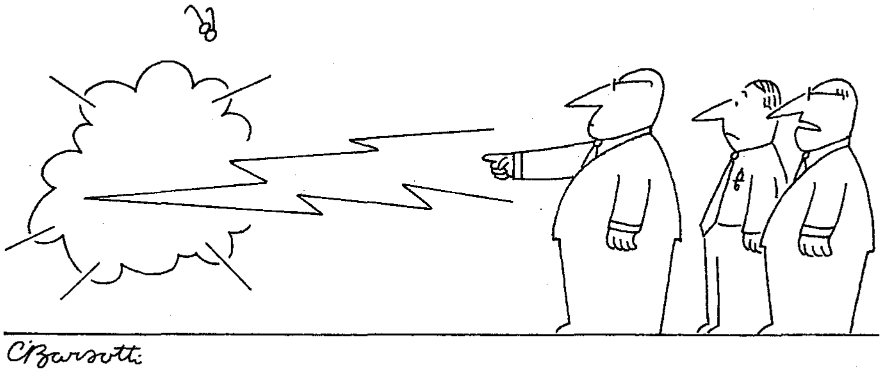
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

man who ever lived—just the eighth-richest American alive right now, *Forbes* reckons—but he is by far the richest person in the city he governs. The *Times* reports that he will have personally spent well over a hundred million dollars getting reëlected this year, noting, "He has now spent more of his own money than any other individual in United States history in the pursuit of public office." But even that's not the bottom line, not really. Bloomberg isn't just the city's biggest getter; he's also the city's—and the nation's—biggest giver. Last year, he showered two hundred and thirty-five million dollars in cash on organizations that do all kinds of good works in fields like health, education, and the arts. Good works are a good thing. When it comes to political power, though, Bloomberg's giving has been a powerful strategic asset to Bloomberg's getting. Five hundred-plus of the twelve hundred-plus recipients of the Mayor's personal largesse are based in the city. The world of nonprofits and charity dinners and patronage of the arts includes a large swath of the city's power élite. One may note that the Mayor had the support, tacit or open, of that élite when he contrived to overturn the law, twice approved by the voters, that would have barred him from a third term. One may also note that he enjoys similar support from the city's most prominent black pastors, whose churches and causes benefit from what the *Times* calls his "unusual combination of city money, private philanthropy, political appointments and personal attention," even though his opponent (for the record, that would be the current city comptroller, Bill Thompson) is African-American.

In broad outline, New Yorkers know all this. We know that we're bought and paid for. We know that there is something unseemly, even humiliating, about submitting ourselves to be ruled by the richest man in town. We know that the muscling aside of term limits, whatever the law's merits, was a travesty. We know that the Mayor's campaign this time has been puzzlingly, pettily negative. Yet we will, most of us, troop to the polls on Tuesday and pull the lever for Mayor Mike. The truth is that Michael Bloomberg has been a very good mayor. The record is mixed, of course, but the mixture is largely positive. Crime is down. Public education is better, owing mainly to the Mayor's takeover of the system. The racial rancor of Giuliani Time is gone. People are healthier and longer-lived, and it would be rash to suggest that the Mayor's nanny-state initiatives—his smoking bans, his banishment of trans fats, his posted calorie counts—have had nothing to do with this happy development. He has fought the good fight for congestion pricing and gun control. His plans for a West Side football coliseum were thwarted, thank God, and his new stadiums for the Yankees and the Mets cost the city a bundle and are unfriendly to fans of modest means, but his bike lanes are terrific and his transformation of Times Square into a people's piazza was visionary, fun, and cheap.

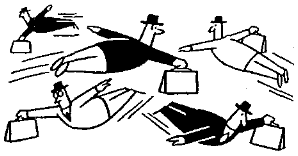
The Mayor has ruled us well, but he has infantilized us. We are a little too much like the passive Romans of Crassus' day, when the institutions of the old republic were giving way to a despotic (and competent) imperium. "People got used to the idea of them," Edith Hamilton wrote of Crassus and his fellow-triumvirs, Pompey and Caesar, "and when four years later their powerful organization was completed and they began to act openly, honored and honorable patriots could find excellent reasons for acquiescing in their running the city. Indeed, it seemed exceedingly probable that if they did not do so there would be nobody to run it." If Bloomberg had been satisfied with two terms, he would be leaving office a beloved legend, a municipal god. He'll get his third, but we'll give it to him sullenly, knowing that while it probably won't measure up to his first two—times are hard, huge budget gaps are at hand—it'll probably be good enough. The Pax Bloombergiana will endure a while longer. But then what? Will we have forgotten how to govern ourselves?

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



"What the labor-relations board doesn't know won't hurt it."

HERE TO THERE DEPT.
OUT TO LUNCH



The week before last, two Northwest pilots overshot Minneapolis, their destination, by a hundred and fifty miles, apparently oblivious of their instruments and their internal clocks, as well as of a barrage of increasingly desperate radio calls from air-traffic control. Afterward, they explained that they'd logged onto their personal laptop computers and become so engrossed—not in FarmVille or porn, or even good old off-line activity, such as a fistfight or a nap, but, rather, if you believe them, in the nuances of the airline's new crew flight-scheduling procedure—that they'd essentially forgotten where they were and what they were supposed to be doing. Which was landing a plane. The equivalent for a text-messaging driver might be for him to veer off a turnpike into a cornfield and drive twenty miles through the corn rows—stalks thumping the hood, G.P.S. lady losing her mind—without once looking up from the task of typing a heartfelt response to a wireless provider's auto-generated telemarketing text. That is, it's almost unimaginable.

Around the same time, researchers at Western Washington University released the results of an experiment in what's called "inattentional blindness"—a state of such absorption in an activity that you fail to notice really obvious stuff around you, like a guy in a gorilla suit or the state of Wisconsin. In this particular case, it was a clown on a unicycle, pedalling through an open square on campus. Of the test subjects who were walking by while talking on their cell phones, roughly three out of four failed to see the clown; of those who were merely walking, and not talking, the number was much lower. The conclusion was that when you are on the phone you are out to lunch—unless you are actually out to lunch, in which case if you're on the phone you aren't really at lunch anymore. You are, in your mind's inattentionally blind eye, somewhere else, maybe plowing through a cornfield or ghost-planing over Green Bay. It may be that the only thing that can break a phone call's inattentional spell is an e-mail, to judge by that conspicuous silence or keyboard tapping at the other end of the line. Anyway. What? Yes. Anyway. One study says that e-mail is more corrosive to your I.Q. than pot.

Texting while driving a car, or even a train, can be lethal: that is clear. So can merely talking, hands-free or no, especially if the unicycling clown is a cement truck or a bend in the road. (In some circles, driving while celling is now called "pulling a Shriver," after Maria Shriver, the wife of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, of California, who has been caught a few times violating her state's no-cell-phone law.) The cops in New York staged a one-day crackdown recently, which resulted in more than seven thousand summonses but probably little in the way of changed behavior. Good intentions and police action may be no match for the encroachments of gadgetry and wirelessness. Life is and always has been full of distractions, yes; it may be that life itself is a distraction—from death. But our attention flits and wanders as never before. The consequences, outside the cockpit and the driver's seat, are as yet unclear. In August, a burglar in West Virginia broke into a house and stole some diamonds, but before fleeing the scene he decided to check his Facebook page. He forgot to log off. The victim discovered it on her computer when she got home.

Studies have shown that multitasking, even of the law-abiding kind, doesn't work. You just perform each task less efficiently. Marshall McLuhan predicted that technology would sharpen our senses, but, instead, as the writer Michael Bugeja said last week, it seems to split them. (A few years ago, Bugeja, with a colleague, started writing an article called "Media Saturation Kills," but he got distracted by another deadline and never finished it.) "If we don't understand technology," he said, via landline, "it's going to use and abuse us and drain our bank accounts—"

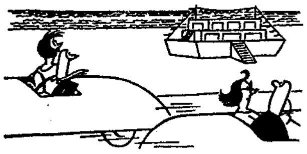
LMAO!
LOL!!!
STFU
L8R...

The chime of a text message came in on the cell: World Series tickets! In sports-page jargon, "distractions" has long been a euphemism for the temptations, such as booze, drugs, and women, that can sap professional athletes of their powers. It's a convenient formulation, insofar as the athletes, and the games they play, are in themselves distractions—circuses—that keep the rest of us from paying attention to whatever it is we should be paying attention to. Who knows the cost? "Meet you at seven-thirty at Gate 2."

Bugeja was saying something about pillars of salt. No, officer, I did not see a clown. Wait, is that Milwaukee?

—Nick Paumgarten

MOONLIGHTING
MARTHA SLEPT HERE



Carter Glatt, a sixteen-year-old junior at the Horace Mann School, is lanky, with black hair and long eyelashes. He loves to play sports, especially football and tennis. He speaks in a slightly stiff, respectful manner that suggests that he's used to conversing with adults. He carries a BlackBerry with a crack down the front. Last summer, he started a business, but he wouldn't be able to run it if his mother didn't drive him around.

Glatt's family owns a weekend house in Southampton (his father is a hedge-fund manager), and one recent Saturday he was sprawled in the back seat of his mother's Mercedes S.U.V., narrating a tour of the neighborhood for a visitor. "Is Bernie Madoff's house on there?" he asked himself. "Yup, I think it's 216 Montauk Highway." A copy of the Hampton Star Map—Glatt's creation, which he sells for seven dollars and ninety-five cents—was spread out in front of him.

Glatt got the idea for his map last year, when his family took a trip to Los Angeles and spent a few hours with a Hollywood star map, driving past the houses of some of his favorite celebrities (Tom Cruise, Will Smith). The Hamptons, he decided, could use a star map of their own. "There is such a dense population of celebrities—if you live anywhere out here, you're living near one of them," he said.

He did research for the map, and designed it, and, with money that he saved scooping ice cream at MaggieMoo's, in Southampton, produced two thousand copies. His target customers: tourists, real-estate agents, and anyone who wants to know which of the mansions on Henry Ford II's former Water Mill estate belongs to Paris Hilton's parents. "I had to go through the Internet for hours, looking for people's addresses," he said. "If I wasn't a hundred-per-cent positive it was the person's address, I didn't put it on the map. For example, Jon Bon Jovi. I believe he's at Lily Pond and Ocean, but I didn't want to put him there without a precise address. So he'll have to be in next year's edition."

There are sixty-seven houses on the map. Their owners range from the fashion industry (Tory Burch, Calvin Klein) to the art world (Chuck Close, Julian Schnabel), from literature (E. L. Doctorow, Tom Wolfe) to business (David Koch, George Soros) and entertainment (Steven Spielberg, Russell Simmons), and include at least one person Glatt's mom had never heard of (Bob Balaban).

The first house on the tour was Candice Bergen's, which is near Martha Stewart's place, on Lily Pond Lane, in East Hampton. "Could you go down Egypt Lane, please, Mummy?" Glatt asked. The car stopped in front of a large wooden house partly hidden by a wall of trimmed hedges. "Look how good her privet looks compared to that one," Mrs. Glatt said, peering out the window. "Do you want to do Further Lane?"

"No, thank you," Glatt said. "Jerry Seinfeld lives there, but you can't see his house. The only thing you can see is that he has a baseball diamond."

The map is printed on glossy paper and has pictures of starfish on it, and Glatt said that he's sold "a couple of hundred" copies so far. You can buy it online ("I've had people from France, England, and Bangladesh check out the Web site") and at a few stores, but generally it has proved to be a tough sell. Several local business owners told him that they couldn't carry the map because it might upset their celebrity clients. "And there is definitely a kid factor," Glatt said. "No one told me, 'You know, you're sixteen, I can't do this.' But I did get that kind of vibe from some people."

When asked how he balances his business life with the demands of high school, Glatt said, "I have to find an equilibrium. School is definitely very important to me, and so is this."

"School is No. 1," his mother interjected from behind the wheel.

"School is the priority," Glatt said, correcting himself.

After swinging by the homes of Mel Brooks ("You see him walking on the beach a lot"), Christie Brinkley ("You know she's here when her umbrellas are up"), and Howard Stern ("The Maserati's in"), it was time to head back. For next year's edition, Glatt is working on finding a sponsor to buy an ad on the back. He has big plans. "One day, I'd like to own the New York Mets," he said. "Even if it's a minority stake." (He took a sports-management class at Georgetown over the summer.) "I'd love to reach that point in my life where I could say, 'I have the New York Mets.' That would be cool."

—*Sheelah Kolhatkar*

INK

CLEANED OUT

Eve Ensler, the activist, threw open the door of her apartment in the Flatiron district the other day to host a party, but, before she did, she put up a sign: "Kindly Remove Your Shoes Before Entering." For a certain type of guest—the sort who has constructed her outfit around a pair of high-heeled boots—this is an injunction that can ruin an evening. Fortunately, many of Ensler's invitees were veterans of spiritual retreats and self-help workshops, and therefore were ladies who take shoelessness in stride.

The guest of honor, Kim Rosen, whose new book, "Saved by a Poem: The Transformative Power of Words," provided the occasion for the gathering, sported an immaculate pedicure, with sparkly black nail polish. "It makes me so happy when I look down," she explained. Rosen, who is fifty-three, and wore a floaty black tunic over black pants, describes herself as a spoken-word artist and a teacher of self-inquiry. According to her Web site, she is a "Pathwork Helper and a certified practitioner of the Breathwork and the Work of Byron Katie," and is trained in "Core Energetic Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Drama Therapy, and Hands-On Healing."

Rosen also writes poetry, although she is primarily a kind of poetic cover artist: she recites aloud the work of others (Rilke, Rumi, Neruda), in order to enhance the spiritual growth of her audience. "The amazing thing about Kim is that she loves poetry, but she is not a reader," the poet Marie Howe, who taught Rosen at Sarah Lawrence, said. "She has done an amazing thing—she has taken this poetry into her. She has become a book."

Howe turned to Rosen. "How many poems are inside of you?" she asked.

"A hundred and ten or a hundred and twenty, in various stages of disintegration," Rosen replied.

Rosen discovered the power of verse in midlife. "In 1994, I had an incapacitating depression," she explained. "I was a psychotherapist, and a spiritual teacher, but none of my accrued wisdom helped me." Instead, she began learning poems by heart. "I realized that I was healing myself," she said. "The words and the rhythms were coming into me, rewiring me. I had what Oprah calls an 'Aha!' moment."

Almost a year ago, Rosen had what a creature less evolved than Oprah might call an "Oh, shit!" moment: she discovered that she had lost her life's savings to Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme. (She had recently invested in a feeder fund for Madoff, having taken her money out of the stock market in September, 2008.) "When I lost the money, I froze, and the words of a poem came into my mind," she said. "It was by Naomi Shihab Nye, and it began, 'Before you know what kindness really is/you must lose things,/feel the future dissolve in a moment/like salt in a weakened broth.' I was obsessed with Googling this poem—I was thinking I should call a lawyer—and I proceeded to make it my practice and my prayer."

As it turns out, being fleeced by Madoff provided Rosen with an unexpected lesson. "I was losing a material abundance that had separated me from the rest of humanity," she said. "And it cleaned me out, so that kindness came toward me." Friends made unsolicited loans: after Rosen swore off Starbucks, one mailed a check earmarked "For lattes." "People ask me if I would rewind it if I could, and I wouldn't," she said. "I would like to keep what I have learned. But I would also like to get my money back."

Ensler invited her guests to be seated, and Rosen recited several poems. They included the Nye verse, and a Mary Oliver poem called "The Journey" ("One day you finally knew/what you had to do, and began/though the voices around you/kept shouting/their bad advice"). Rosen said that she had once incanted this poem in Kenya, at a home that Ensler helped establish for girls who had fled their villages in order to avoid genital mutilation. ("Is Mary Oliver Masai?" one of the girls asked.)

Upon completing the verses, Rosen bowed and said, "The book has been a community project. I'm a community project. I think of my friends as my composite guru." Then she reminded everyone that copies of her book were available, and that they cost fifteen dollars each.

—*Rebecca Mead*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

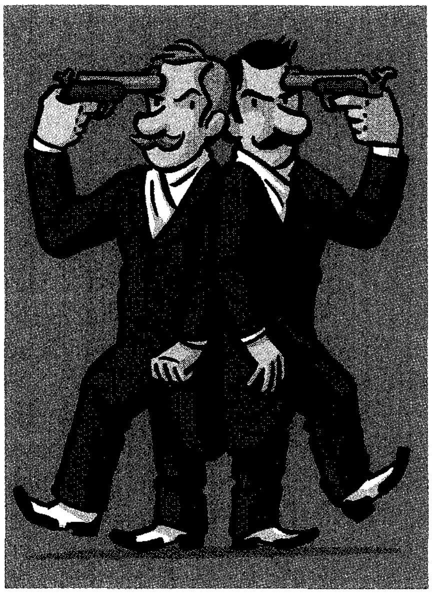
PRICED TO GO

In the spring of 1992, the airline industry was in dismal shape, debilitated by the recently ended recession and an over-reliance on discounting. So American Airlines announced a new "value pricing" plan, which entailed cutting fares while replacing complex discounts with a simple, four-tier price system. It assumed that its competitors would follow suit, stabilizing prices in the industry. Instead, T.W.A. and USAir announced even bigger fare cuts, which American matched and, in some cases, surpassed. The other major carriers had no choice but to go along, and the industry found itself in the middle of a full-fledged price war. In a matter of months, the airlines collectively lost four billion dollars.

That was, as one business professor put it, "the mother of all pricing battles." But at bottom it was just like other price wars: all the companies involved got hurt. So you might wonder why Wal-Mart recently decided to start its own price war, taking on Amazon in the online book market. Wal-Mart began by marking down the prices of ten best-sellers—including the new Stephen King and the upcoming Sarah Palin—to ten bucks. When Amazon, predictably, matched that price, Wal-Mart went to nine dollars, and, when Amazon matched again, Wal-Mart went to $8.99, at which point Amazon rested. (Target, too, jumped in, leading Wal-Mart to drop to $8.98.) Since wholesale book prices are traditionally around fifty per cent off the cover price, and these books are now marked down sixty per cent or more, Amazon and Wal-Mart are surely losing money every time they sell one of the discounted titles. The more they sell, the less they make. That doesn't sound like good business.

It's easy to see how price wars get started. In industries where a lot of competitors are selling the same product—mangoes, gasoline, DVD players—price is the easiest way to distinguish yourself. The hope is that if you cut prices enough you can increase your market share, and even your profits. But this works only if your competitors won't, or can't, follow suit. More likely, they'll cut prices, too, and you'll end up selling the same share of mangoes, only at a lower price. From a game-theory perspective, price wars are usually negative-sum games: everyone loses. A recent study found that, if competitors do match price cuts, industry profits can get cut almost in half.

The best way to win a price war, then, is not to play in the first place. Instead, you can compete in other areas: customer service or quality. Or you can collude with your putative competitors: that's why cartels like OPEC exist. Or—since overt collusion is usually illegal—you can employ subtler tactics (which economists call "signalling"), like making public statements about the importance of "stable pricing." The idea is to let your competitors know that you're not eager to slash prices—but that, if a price war does start, you'll fight to the bitter end. One way to establish that peace-preserving threat of mutual assured destruction is to commit yourself beforehand, which helps explain why so many retailers promise to match any competitor's advertised price. Consumers view these guarantees as conducive to lower prices. But in fact offering a price-matching guarantee should make it less likely that competitors will slash prices, since they know that any cuts they make will immediately be matched. It's the retail version of the doomsday machine.



These tactics and deterrents don't always work, though, which is why price wars keep breaking out. Sometimes it's rational: when a company is genuinely more efficient than its competitors, lowering prices is usually a smart move. (That's how competition is supposed to work.) More often, price wars are reckless gambles. In crowded markets, smaller competitors sometimes figure—wrongly—that they can cut prices and win extra business without the bigger players' noticing. Also, many executives are obsessed with market share, even at the expense of profit, and slashing prices will often win customers in the short run. Hubris, too, plays a role: executives tend to believe that their competitors will crack first. Such price wars are like games of chicken, and typically end just as badly.

Amazon and Wal-Mart hardly seem reckless, though. So why did they go to war? The answer is that they didn't, really. Sure, Wal-Mart is making a statement that it's a player in the online world, but the real goal of this conflict isn't to lure readers away from Amazon, and it isn't to get people to buy one of those ten books. It's to lure them online, away from big booksellers and other retailers, and then sell them other stuff. Usually, price wars wreak havoc because they erode the pricing power of an entire business. But, because this price war involves just ten items, its impact on revenue will be small, and outweighed by the positive effects of all the publicity. (It has garnered publicity because it involves books. A big banana price war has been raging in Britain, but you probably haven't heard about it.) It's textbook loss-leader economics.

Outraged book publishers and booksellers are making exaggerated claims about how the discounts will devalue books and wreck the industry. But they're right about one thing. The real competition in this price war is not between Wal-Mart and Amazon but between those behemoths and everyone else—and the damage everyone else is incurring is deliberate, not collateral. Wal-Mart and Amazon have figured out how to fight a price war and win: make sure someone else takes the blows.

—*James Surowiecki*

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James Surowiecki's notes for this column.

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

TALK THIS WAY

The man who makes Hollywood sound right.

BY ALEC WILKINSON

Tim Monich taught Brad Pitt to talk as if he were from somewhere deep in the mountains of Tennessee. He taught Matt Damon to speak as if he were South African, and Hilary Swank to speak like Amelia Earhart, who was from Kansas but had gone to boarding school near Philadelphia, and so had elements of a period upper-class accent—"Kind of high-falutin," Swank told me. In early September, having nearly finished teaching Gerard Butler, who is Scottish, to speak as if he were from New York, for "The Bounty," Monich began teaching Shia LaBeouf, who is from Southern California, to speak as if he'd grown up on Long Island, for "Wall Street 2." Much of Monich's movie work involves getting Northerners to speak like Southerners, and much of his theatre work involves teaching Americans to deliver lines from Shakespeare or Shaw.

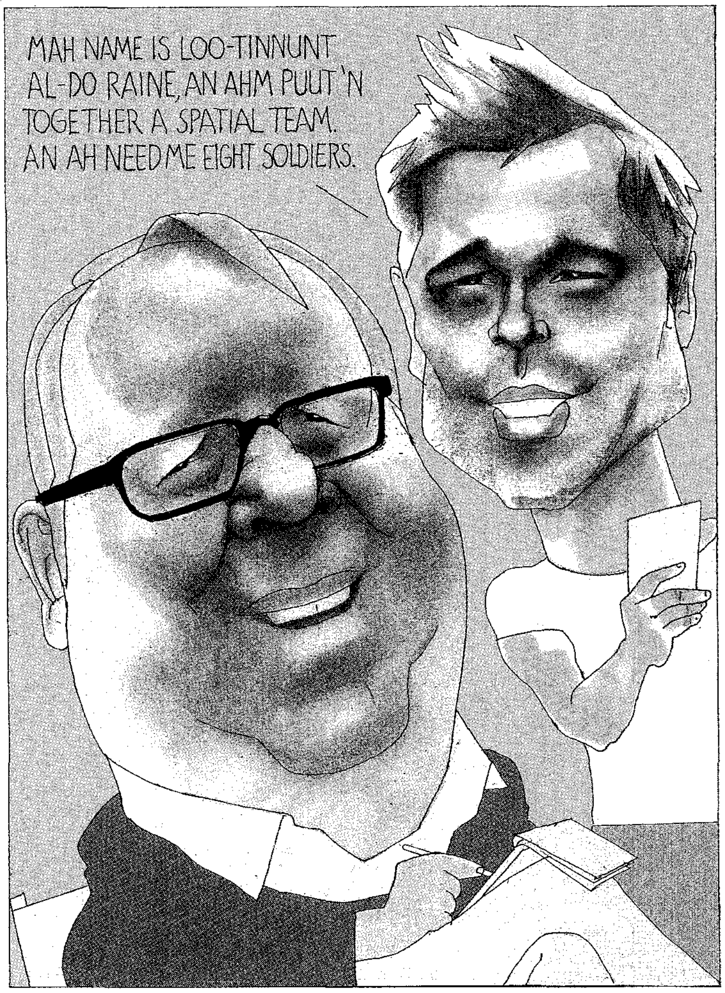
When people ask Monich what he does for a living, he usually makes something up, or says that he works on film crews. He's not shy, but he doesn't like being asked to do accents any more than a magician likes being handed a pack of cards and asked to do a trick. Nor does he enjoy the game of listening to a person he meets and guessing where he was raised. Pedagogically, he is descended from Henry Sweet, the nineteenth-century philologist who was the model for Henry Higgins in "Pygmalion." One of Sweet's students was William Tilly, an Australian who taught at Columbia, and one of Tilly's pupils was Edith Skinner, who was the preëminent dialect and speech teacher for the stage during the middle and later part of the twentieth century. Skinner taught Monich at Carnegie Mellon, and Monich helped revise her classic text, "Speak with Distinction," which was originally published in 1942.

Monich (the name "rhymes with gin-and-tonic," he says) is fifty-nine years old, tall, with thin reddish-blond hair and freckles, a round face, and glasses. He has a rolling gait, from pain in an arthritic hip. For one of his first movies, "Cookie," in 1989, he taught Emily Lloyd, an English actress, to speak like a girl from Brooklyn, and he has since worked on more than a hundred and thirty movies—from "The Age of Innocence" to "X-Men"—and more than a hundred plays. Brad Pitt, who also worked with Monich for "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," said, "He's the maestro." Damon, who first had Monich's help on "The Talented Mr. Ripley," told me, "You don't do anything without seeing what he thinks." He added, "He would go off and invent ways to try to help me."

Donald Sutherland, who is Canadian and has been coached by or has consulted with Monich on dozens of projects—learning to speak like a South African in "A Dry White Season," then like an Englishman, a wealthy New Yorker, a New Englander, a Kansan, a Georgian, an Oregonian, a North Carolinian, a Mississippian, a Michigander, a Minnesotan, and a member of the Polish politburo—told me, "He's not a mechanic, and he doesn't impose. He comes in from underneath and supports your instincts; he doesn't try to define them. There are many people who do what he does, and by and large they offer constraints. He offers liberation."

One day in August, I took the train to Westport, Connecticut, to see Monich, who lives with his wife, the dance writer Linda Szmyd, and their two daughters in an old house that was once partly a barn. Off the kitchen, Monich has an office in which there are shelves of books with such titles as "Swearing," "Americanisms," "More Stage Dialects," and "City of Slang." In the center of the shelves are boxes of CDs—recordings of talkers whose speech represents a particular place, period, or social station. Monich's archive, assembled over thirty years, is almost surely the largest private one of its kind, with approximately six thousand entries.

To listen to it in its entirety would take fifty-three days. Monich began recording people when he was a student in Pittsburgh—he thinks the first entry was either an Englishman or a Southerner. Edith Skinner also kept an archive, but the recordings were on reel-to-reel tape, and so it was unwieldy and haphazardly organized; Monich's is meticulously catalogued. The first box has a label that reads "USA A-H." When I asked what the letters stood for, Monich rose from his chair, examined the box, and said, "Alabama to Hawaii." The next box contained Illinois to Louisiana. There are also boxes for Central and South America, Asia, Europe, England, the Middle East, and Africa, with countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. He keeps one copy of the archive on a hard drive and another in a safe-deposit box in Westport.


MAH NAME IS LOO-TINNUNT AL-DO RAINE, AN AHM PUUT 'N TOGETHER A SPATIAL TEAM. AN AH NEED ME EIGHT SOLDIERS.

Tim Monich coached Brad Pitt for his role in "Inglourious Basterds."

FINN GRAFF

Monich's desire for new speech is keen. "He goes around the world collecting voices like they're coins," Leonardo DiCaprio, who first worked with Monich on "Gangs of New York," told me. If Monich overheard someone on the street and liked the way he talked, he used to ask to record him, but he rarely does that anymore: "You get people who don't know what you're doing, and they don't speak naturally." Initially, he would ask the person to read a text, but "people read aloud haltingly," he said. "They put the emphasis on the wrong words, they get a singsong voice, and they don't pass over weak words—'of,' 'the,' and 'have.'" Still, he said, "I never use the word 'accent' or 'dialect,' " because they make speakers self-conscious. "I say I love to collect stories, and if they press me I say I love voices, and if they push me farther I say that I sometimes help actors do voices." A number of entries were made on movie sets. Gerard Butler told me, "Someone will come to the set, and Tim will say, 'Gerry, do you mind if I speak to your friend? I heard something interesting in the way he talked.' They all come out of the trailer, and I realize they've been Tim Moniched."

Monich also collects accents from television. He recorded snippets of snake handlers and people who speak in tongues from a PBS documentary, but he prefers shows like "Book TV," where people speak at some length. Charlie Rose, Tavis Smiley, and "Meet the Press" are good for foreign accents, especially those of diplomats, lawyers, and politicians.

The archive also includes Gertrude Stein reading "An Early Portrait of Henri Matisse"; Ernest Hemingway reading his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in a pinched, slightly tinny voice; J. R. R. Tolkien reciting a poem in Elvish (it sounds like a blend of Hebrew and Middle English); and Edwin Booth, in a hotel room in Chicago in 1890, reciting some lines from Othello's speech to the Venetian Senate. Ethel Roosevelt Derby, Teddy Roosevelt's daughter, leads a tour of Sagamore Hill, the house on Long Island where she grew up. "Nobody ever had breakfast in bed in those days," she says. "I never remember *anyone* having breakfast in bed. Ever." Her accent is the cultivated one of the period—partly British, partly an ancestor of Long Island lockjaw. Monich interviews a Southern man who talks about a bridge that was built near his home: "They wanted it to look just like God set it in. . . . Right off the top of my head, I don't know the millions it cost." Another time, Monich asks an Irish actor how he got his start, and the man says, "Do you want the truth, Tim?"

> I slugged two cops one night. I was out drinking one night, and I *smacked* two cops. . . . They sent me up to see a probation officer, a fine, lovely young girl. . . . She said to me, "You're looking at two and a half years here for beating up police officers, and I'll send you up to do, p'yaint the props on a drama project we're doing, and I'll get you off with suspended sentence." I went up to p'yaint the props, walked in through the door, done the first theatre, came and went, "I *want* to do this."

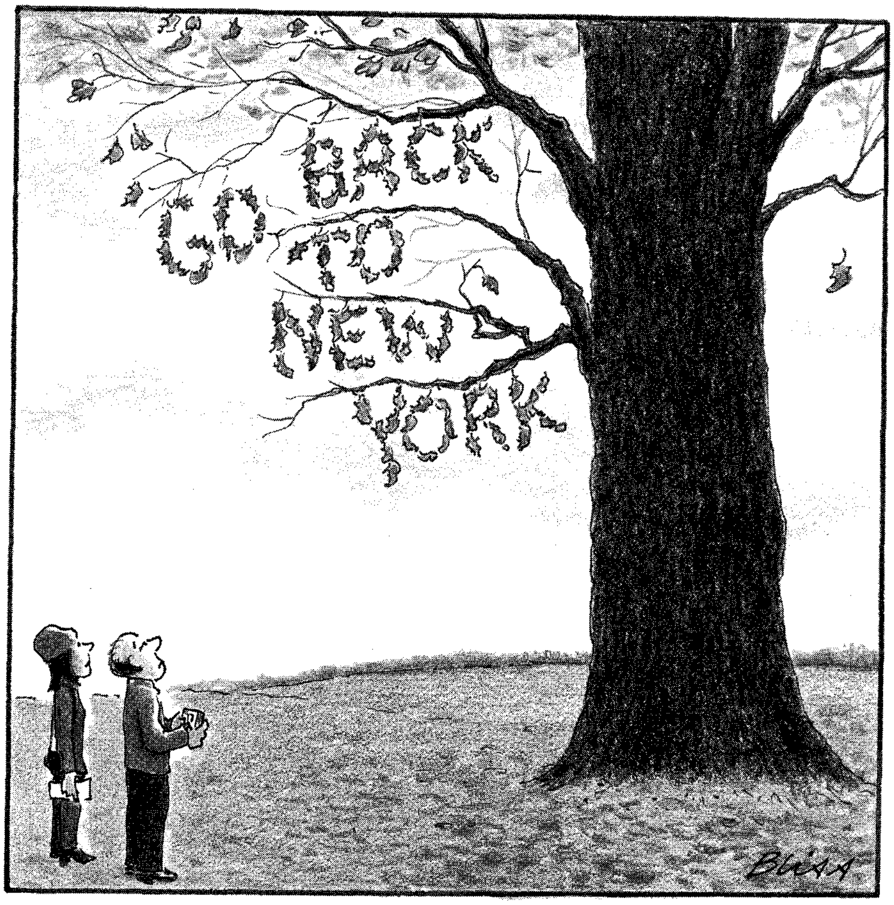
We listened to a tape of a man in Cut Off, Louisiana, who said he fished for frimps. I looked at Monich. "Shrimps," he said.

Actors don't need dialect coaches, characters do. Some actors enjoy learning accents—"It's fun when you hear someone else's voice. Your voice can change, your delivery changes," Matt Damon told me—but mostly, Monich says, they would prefer to speak the way they speak. He begins by talking with the director about how a character should sound. Then he talks to the actor about the character—where he might have gone to school, what he does for a living—and decides which voices from his archive might provide a model. (The interaction with the director can be as important as the one with the actor. "He's my first choice," Martin Scorsese told me. "He has a way with the actors—he doesn't intrude, he doesn't distract, he doesn't confuse them with different interpretations—and he understands all kinds of actors, and that each has a different temperament and way of working.") He usually gives an actor four or five choices, and the actor selects one, from which Monich makes tapes distilling the vowel and consonant sounds that typify the dialect. For "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull," Steven Spielberg wanted Cate Blanchett to have a broad Russian accent that evoked classic espionage films, and while women usually select the accents of women and men choose men, Blanchett chose the accent of a Russian general that Monich had heard delivering a speech on C-SPAN.

Monich and the actor then "play a word, listen to it, and say it," he said—do language lab, that is. "I'm listening for something slightly off," he said. "It could be the actual vowel, it could be the placement or emphasis, the vocal quality—too nasal, too throaty, too gravelly. It could be too long. Sometimes somebody will say something perfectly, but I hear the effort; it's not easy yet." They also do lip and tongue drills. "The movement inside the mouth is the very core of what's done," Monich said. " 'You're putting the tip of the tongue correctly toward the upper front teeth, but you're letting the front of the tongue touch the back of the teeth, and you should let it lie flat' is the kind of thing you say. 'Round the lips, drop the jaw,' or 'You're rounding your lips when you should be relaxing them,' or vice versa. At the beginning, much of the work is literal and physical. I make drawings, and I even have a half denture I bring out."

Monich invents rhymes and sentences using words from the script—what he calls random acting. "If the actor has to say 'payback,' I might have him say, 'She's got it on playback. You've got a little bit of a swayback,'" he said. "Then say it when you're laughing, say it crying, say it angry. Now do one with 'payback' where you're accusing someone. Now your two-year-old has turned over her bowl of oatmeal and you're saying, 'I guess that's payback.'" The point of whispering the words or shouting them, speaking them slowly or quickly, is to make the actor aware of how the words feel in all circumstances, so that when he eventually delivers a line he won't have to reflect on how to pronounce the words.

We listened to a tape of a British actor—Monich was helping him to play an American priest. The script called for him to recite Psalm 23. "He needs to sound more or less like a guy from California," Monich said. The actor spoke slowly, as if weary. "Can you hear 'Lord' sounds almost like 'lowered'?" Monich said. "Also, 'waters' is sounding too round for California, so I told him to make it rhyme with 'fodder' and 'totter.'"


GO BACK TO NEW YORK

Monich has offerings for the eye as well as the ear. He writes an actor's lines in a faux-phonetic style he made up by combining elements of actual phonetics with approximations of sounds. To help Brad Pitt say, in "Inglourious Basterds," "My name is Lieutenant Aldo Raine, and I'm putting together a special team, and I need me eight soldiers," Monich wrote, "Mah name is loo-tinnunt Al-do raine, an ahm puut'n together a spatial team. An ah need me eight soldiers." (Normally, Pitt, who's from Missouri, would say, "My name uz loo-tennunt al-doh raine, un I'm pudding da-gether a spesh'll teem un I need me ayt sohl-jerz.") To teach Matt Damon to sound like an Afrikaner for "Invictus," Monich had him say, "It's a military university," which he wrote as "It's a mull a tree Una verse a tea." (Being from Boston, Damon would say, "It's a mill-a-tairee yoona-versa-dee.") For Butler, in "The Bounty," to say, as a New Yorker, "Not as miserable as I made her, believe you me," Monich wrote, "Nahduz mizra-b'l uz ahi mehid h'rr, buh-leev yoo me." (Butler, being Scottish, would have said, "Naw' uz mizzarabull uz eye^{ee} may^{ee} d er, b'll eev yew me.")

Brad Pitt received a list of twenty-five phrases to drill on, including "Is inny-buddy a-lahv own ahr sahd?" Damon got phrases such as "Go a hiddens mallet" ("Go ahead and smell it") and "Beck toosa Theffra ka" ("Back to South Africa").

With an actor who has no facility at all for accents, Monich tries to teach simple things to keep him from sounding ridiculous. "What you would do with anyone untalented," he said. "Try to protect them from mistakes. Give them some confidence."

Resistance is most likely to come from actors in secondary roles. "You never hear it with the stars, because they want to be good," he said. "The kind of actors who do accents are the kind who treasure the transformation. They're very amenable." I asked Monich if he had ever encountered an actor who refused his help, and he said only once. "At the Public Theatre. The part required an upper-class

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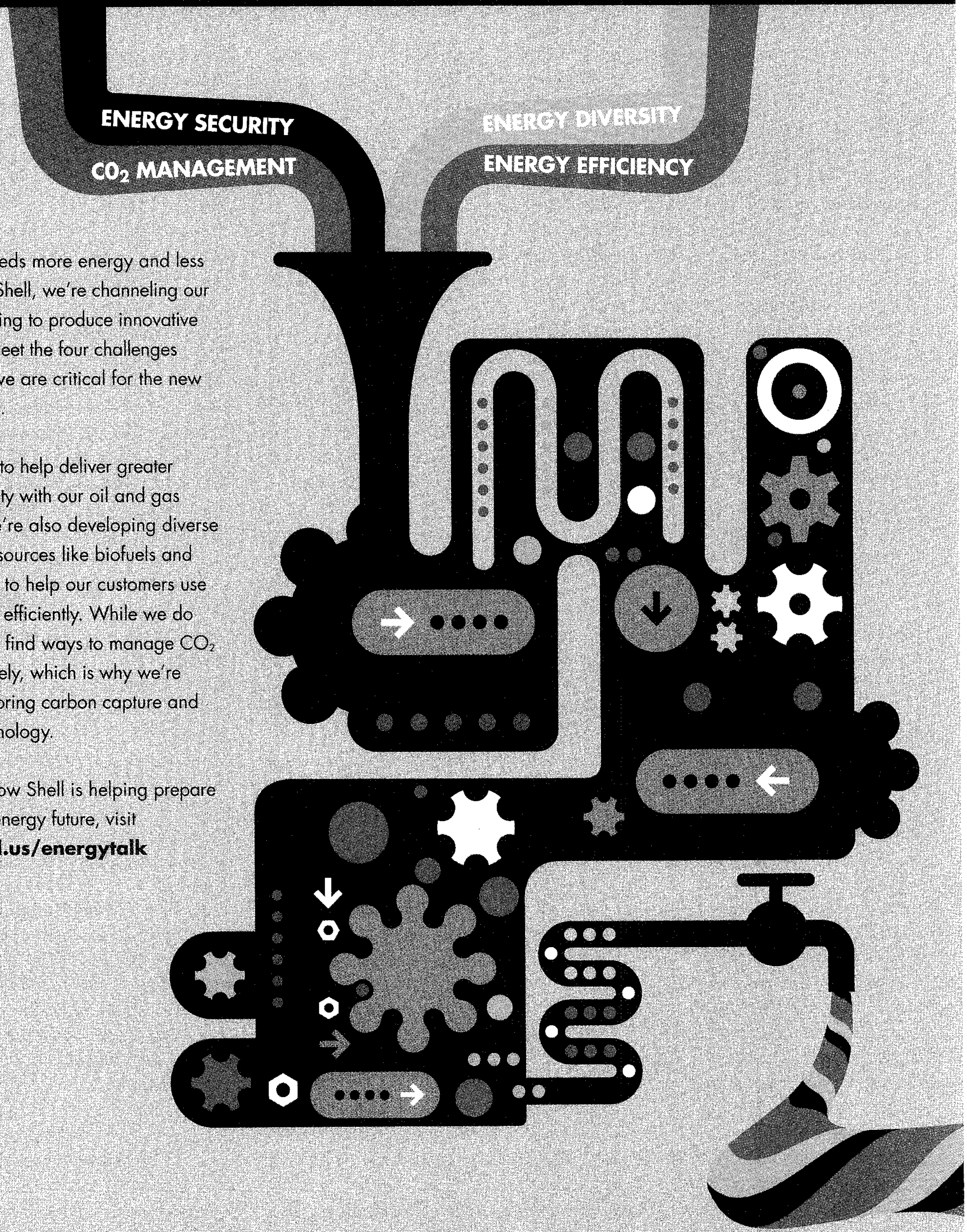

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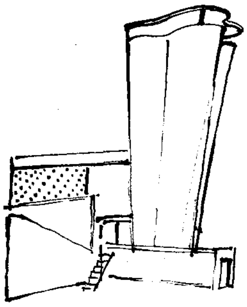
English accent, and he sounded as if he were from Ohio, but he said he sounded fine and wasn't going to change anything. It was the only time I ever had an actor yell at me."

"Did you ever work with him again?"

"I never even ever heard of him again," Monich said.

The way a person talks is called his or her idiolect. A collection of idiolects form a dialect, which is an agreement, common to a place, about grammar and vocabulary and certain expressions. An accent is the way someone pronounces words in the dialect. In America, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, teaching dialects was twinned with the teaching of pronunciation—what was called "proper speech." The aspirational accent was that of New England, where people would drop their "r"s, and say "hoff" instead of "half," and "closs" instead of "class." Franklin Roosevelt spoke with this kind of accent, as did Nelson Rockefeller when he was young. Socially ambitious people newly come to wealth took lessons in elocution, and members of the new middle class, more than actors, bought books on how to speak a certain way. The practice waned in the nineteen-sixties, when agreements about proper speech were no longer universal.

To be persuasive, characters in a film should sound as if they lived in the same place or at least inhabited the same period. "Nobody's going to sound exactly alike," Carla Meyer, a highly regarded dialect coach, told me. "No two members of a family even sound alike. It's important to the film, though, that the accent fit like a wonderful piece of wardrobe." How much of a challenge that is depends on the actors. "Some actors are trained to listen; they've been to drama school," she said. "If someone comes in with a fabulous ear—they're a great mimic—you start where they are and go backward, since they tend to be a little broad." Coaching is a matter of identifying what parts of an accent are central and converting them into forms that can be taught: "In the North we tend to say we have 'ten fingers,' but in the South they might say 'tin.' "



Meyer asked me what Monich was working on, and when I told her that he was coaching Gerard Butler she said, "Good luck with that."

"Do you mean he doesn't like to work?"

"Oh, no, he's wonderful," she said. "I worked with him on 'Timeline.' It's just that he's *very* Scottish. It's hard to come that far. It's a tough accent to come to."

Andy Tennant, the director of "The Bounty," told Monich that he wanted an accent for Butler that suggested New York but not necessarily an ex-New York cop. (Monich is not coaching Butler's co-star, Jennifer Aniston, whose character doesn't require a particular accent.) "You know how they sometimes say, 'In this movie, the city of New York is as much a character as the actors'? Well, that's not this movie," Monich told me. "We're not doing an out-and-out New York accent."

He took my notebook and pencil and wrote "maa-ridge" and "mair-ridge." "In New York they say the first, and in California the second," he explained. Butler had selected from among five accents Monich gave him that of the writer Edward Conlon, who was born in the Bronx, went to Harvard, and became a New York policeman. Monich had recorded Conlon on "Book TV." (Among those Butler had decided against was that of a cookie distributor from Queens.)

During Hollywood's earlier days, movie studios had dialogue coaches, who mostly ran lines with actors and didn't much concern themselves with the accuracy of a character's accent. In "Gone with the Wind," Leslie Howard sounds English, which he was, and Vivien Leigh, who was born in India and educated mostly in England, sounds as if she thought Southerners were either Gypsies or Italians. According to Monich, as people became accustomed to hearing on television news the way people around the world actually talked, they began to expect actors to speak as if they came from the places their characters did.

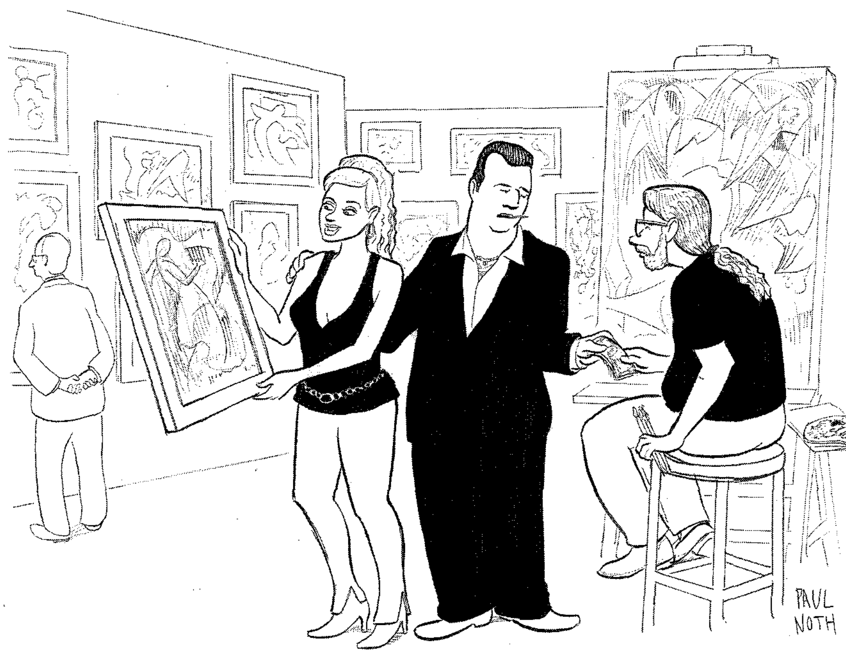
Diane Kamp, an agent who represents sixteen dialect coaches and used to represent Monich (he now represents himself), says that Monich was a pioneering figure in establishing dialect coaches in Hollywood. "He brought Edith Skinner's work in the theatre and phonetics to television and movies in a way that people could understand," she told me.

Earlier, Kamp said, most movie actors thought that the ability to speak in dialects was a talent that one either had or didn't have. Monich was among those who helped them realize that it could be taught. "From something entirely mysterious, it became a skill everyone could master," she said. "As word of his expertise grew, he'd get more work than he could do and he'd say, 'How about Carla Meyer, or Jessica Drake?' " Kamp estimates that there are twenty-five dialect coaches working regularly in movies and theatre in the United States, fifteen in Britain and Ireland, and ten in Canada. "They're like Steadicam operators," she said. "They do something very specific, and there aren't that many of them." The demand grew as the British and Australian film businesses declined and their actors came looking for work in America, and is now greater than ever before.

Monich grew up in Corona, California, east of Los Angeles. His father, who loved opera, ran heavy machinery for a company that built freeways, and his mother was a reporter for a small paper called the Riverside *Press-Enterprise*, where she covered school-board meetings and society news and sometimes wrote features. In high school, Monich was cast by the English department in two plays, and he liked acting and thought that he might study drama in college. At the University of California at Riverside, which he attended while living at home, a professor told him that "if I was serious about drama I should go to Carnegie Mellon," Monich said. "He also told me that I should major as a director. He may have realized before I did that I had no talent as an actor."

At Carnegie Mellon, he met Edith Skinner. "She was eccentric, impassioned, and charismatic, a large figure for anyone to encounter," he said. "The title of her class was Speech. Third year was dialects. From the first day, I could tell exactly what changes she was making; I could hear them and reproduce them. Most kids don't go around in drama school saying, 'I'm going to be a speech teacher,' so I didn't really have a model. But in my last year I went to the head of my department and said, 'Everybody's talking about going to New York and the roles they want to do and the projects they want to direct. I have no roles I want to play—I'm really at a loss.' He said, 'Do you want to work in theatre at all?' and I said, 'Absolutely.' 'Well, where is your interest?' "

The head of the department arranged for a grant that allowed Monich to do graduate work with Skinner. After he was done, he was hired at Juilliard, where Skinner also spent part of the year, and where he taught from 1975 to 1987. By then, a kind of fatigue had settled over him: "My classes were very small, five, six people, and many became stars—Kevin Spacey, Val Kilmer, Kelly McGillis. But I couldn't cheerlead the ones who didn't seem to care. I started ignoring them. They'd do their work, and I'd say, 'That's good,' and turn away. It's unprofessional. You will do anything to have the actors sound good. Just for those very few students, I didn't have it in me. Better I get out now, I thought, when I still love it, than when I'm cynical and over it and unhappy. I was already turning down film work, because you can't leave teaching; Juilliard didn't have sabbaticals. I'd been coaching a lot of plays, and I thought that half of my year would be plays and half movies, but it hasn't turned out that way." Most of his time is spent on movies.



"How much more would this be worth if something happened to you?"

• •

One night, after shooting all day in Manhattan, Monich and Butler met to work on the next day's scenes at Butler's loft, a big duplex with lots of dark wood and chandeliers. The first floor of the loft feels like a room in a castle. Butler sat on a couch, and Monich and I took chairs. Butler said that he had heard of Monich well before they began working together. "He's known as the granddaddy of dialect coaches," he said. " 'Speak with Distinction' is the Bible. It's like 'Ulysses'—it's a pretty full-on book. It's how I learned my American accent."

Speaking like an American was very important to him, Butler said. "From the early part of my career, I realized I was only going so far if I didn't know how to speak American. It used to horrify me not to have it down. I was very shy about going to auditions and having to worry about the accent as much as how to read for the part. I could neither master the accent nor the acting. You become robotic, and then you leave very depressed, thinking, I didn't do well. You lose your personality." ("Pairsonality" is how he pronounced it.) "It has never got to the stage where I go into a scene and forget about it," he went on. "It happens at times, but you're never quite as comfortable as you are in your own accent."

There was nobody "more, dare I say it, well researched" than Monich, Butler said. "When I was doing an Irish accent in 'P.S. I Love You,' he said, 'Dublin? What part of Dublin, north or south?' Then, 'Here's a farm outside Dublin, and here's the farmer next door to it.' "

Speaking like an Irishman is difficult for a Scotsman, it turns out. "It's easy to sound like a leprechaun before you know it," Butler said. He found accents more challenging than acting. "Trying to do both together can really tip you over the edge," he said. "You don't want the accent to become a character, but it should inform the character, and it's lovely when you get it right and it's consistent. When that happens, you start to go from where you were to some other feeling for the part."

"Is that what you intend?" I asked Monich.

"I'm steering people toward a certain end," he said. Then he turned to Butler. "Let's do the lines, shall we?"

For an hour, they spoke and whispered and shouted lines from a scene at a motel called Cupid's Cabin. (" 'Nice to see you again, sir!' to your ninety-three-year-old deaf grandmother," Monich instructed him at one point.) When Butler spoke accurately, Monich said, "Good" or "That takes care of that line." When he didn't, Monich said, "That's a little far back—use the tip of your tongue" or "Watch the little diphthong in 'definitely.' " Butler sat on the edge of the couch. He gave the impression of a bright child who wanted to do well but was having trouble sitting still.

"I'd like to see Winnie the Pooh wear a tutu," Monich said. Then, to me, " 'Oo' is a big problem." To Butler, he said, "Now give me ten random 'definitely's." Butler leaned back and put one hand on his head, and his feet on a table, and when he had done quizzical, assenting, emphatically assenting, weary, and aggressive "definitely"s, he said, "Are they sounding right?"

"Definitely," Monich said. "Now do five in a row."

Monich had given Butler thirty phrases, divided according to sounds. For the short "i" sound, he wrote, "Six really big bits of English lipstick in a tin cylinder." For the gruntlike sound that two "o"s sometimes make, he wrote, "A book I took from a good-looking hooker in the woods." For a long "i," "Ninety-nine nighties from a nice Irish ice princess," and for two "l"s, "Tell him Walter Lilly called," which was actually one of Butler's lines, and appeared in Monich's phonetic version of the script as "Tellum wawl-t'r lilly cawlld."

Early on, Monich made Butler a tape highlighting sounds in the script, leaving time for Butler to repeat his syllables and phrases. "Get in the car," Monich said. "Get.in.the.car. Or, getin the car. So you've got 'getting,' 'get.in,' 'getin'—they're all correct. Get in the car. I'm pettin' the cat, I'm settin' the type, it's whettin' my appetite." In a more imperative tone, he said, "Get in. Let in. Car . . . far . . . star . . . bar . . . Just kiddin', get in." Then, ironically, "Just kidding. Juuust kidding, Get in, Getin. I promise, I promise I won't do it again. . . . Prah muss. Muss . . . Thomas. I promise, I won't do it again. . . . I won't do it. . . . I won't brew it. . . . I won't misconstrue it. . . . I certainly won't pooh-pooh it. I can't believe you keep falling for the old get-in-the-car trick."

In their first week, they had a session in which they worked on "because." "You have a choice of saying 'becuz,' if it's unstressed," Monich said. "Yeah, becuz there's nothing wrong with it."

"Yeah, becuz there's nothing wrong with it," Butler said.

"But if it's stressed you say 'buhcaws.' Why? Buhcaws, I mean, I don't know, just buhcaws."

"I don't know, just buhcaws."

"When you say 'buhcaws,' " Butler asked a moment later, "is it '*buh*caws' or is it '*bee*caws'?"

"Buh. *Buh*caws. Like Lauren Bacall."

"Buhcaws," Butler said. "Lauren Bacall."

"Buhcall."

"Lauren Bacall."

"Buhcaws she's a star."

"Buhcaws she's a buhcaw," Butler said. "Buhcaws, becuhz, becaws, no—*buh*caws."

"There's some places where it would be inappropriate to say 'buhcaws'—'I don't want you here, buhcaws it's too much,' " Monich said. "You would just say, 'I don't want you here, becuz it's too much.' "

"Thinking of it as an 'uh' or as an 'ah,' " Butler said, "it suddenly felt like the 'ah' worked better for me."

"If I spell them 'b-a'?" Monich said. (He meant in the phonetic script.)

"Right. Bahcaws."

"If I wrote 'seduce,' would it help 's-u-d' or 's-a-d'?"

"Saduce them," Butler said. "I didn't suhduce them. No, actually the 'uh' works better."

"It's closer phonetically," Monich said. "Like 'supper,' 'sup,' '*suh*duce.' 'Sudden.' "

"Sup, supper, suhduce. Sudden. Sup, supper, *suh*duce."

"Good," Monich said.

On movie sets, Monich sits by himself away from the camera, treating the scene as a radio play, and he restricts his exchanges. "For such a big man, he totally disappears," Liam Neeson told me. "You don't know he's there, but he's listening—absolutely attending and hearing every word. He knows exactly when to approach you and say, 'Watch this sound, watch this word.' He never bombards you." Neeson went on, "Nine times out of ten, when I see certain stars doing accents I can tell Tim's behind it, because it's effortless." He mentioned Leonardo DiCaprio speaking like a white Rhodesian in "Blood Diamond." DiCaprio told me that he flew to South Africa a month before the movie started filming. "If I didn't have Tim there, though, to tell me, 'I know what you're doing, you're trying, but you're going back to habits and things you've done before, and you're starting to sound like an Australian. Let's take it bit by bit, a syllable at a time and as slow as you can'—if I don't have that kind of specific basis, I'm a complete and utter failure," DiCaprio said. "They don't buy the performance unless I spend time with Tim and get verified."

An accent is one of the first things an actor takes up, and how it feels and sounds can influence the decisions he makes. "The accent starts to drive the character," Brad Pitt told me. "It can define the walk, the shoes you wear, the passivity or aggressiveness."

By the time the actor stands in front of the camera, Monich has done the bulk of his teaching work. He has brought in the music, as Pitt told me, meaning "the rhythm and sound of it, so that you hear the melody in the accent." He has worked intimately with the actor, and with sufficient delicacy that he has allowed him to improve without being anxious about his mistakes. "He's very close to us when we're figuring out how the scene is developing," Pitt said. "Meanwhile, the director is talking to you, you're trying to figure out the intention of the scene, something's wrong with the wardrobe, your shoelace is untied—that kind of stuff throws you, especially in the early years. The point I'm trying to make is that he's one of those guys who help you and is not in the way. He helps me with something deeper. I don't feel sure without him. I need him to show me the road map."

Eventually, the accent recedes as a concern. "When you're in the scene and you're thinking about the accent, you don't have it," Hilary Swank said. "At some point, though, it just clicks, and I can let go then of where my jaw goes and where my tongue should be."

One afternoon in September, Monich was expected in the city at the production office for "Wall Street 2," where he was meeting with Oliver Stone and Shia LaBeouf. Monich has been spending five days a week in New York with LaBeouf, and his days off in Boston with Cameron Diaz, who is learning to talk as if she were from the Northeast—she is from Southern California—for "Knight and Day." We took the train together, standing, because Monich's hip feels better when he stands. Somewhere around Mamaroneck, Monich's phone rang, and he said, "I'm on the train now." Then he nodded a few times and hung up. "Oliver's running late," he said. "It will give me more time to work with Shia. I'm going to give him some guys from Long Island from my iPod."

When I called Monich a few days later, he was in a taxicab being driven up Tenth Avenue by a stuntman, following LaBeouf, who was riding a device on the back of a truck—in the movie he will appear to be riding a motorcycle. To record his lines, LaBeouf was wearing a microphone, through which Monich could listen. I asked him if Swank's remarks described what he meant to do, and he said they did, pretty much. "You want to reach the point where when the actors get in front of the camera they're not listening to themselves," he said.

"Because?"

"Because I'm listening for them." ♦

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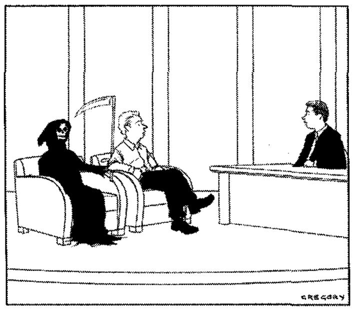

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

LIVE YOUR LIFE

BY DAVE COWEN

> I am not a fan of books. I would never want a book's autograph. I am a proud non-reader of books. I like to get information from doing stuff like actually talking to people and living real life.
>
> —*Kanye West, promoting his book "Thank You and You're Welcome."*

Whoever said life is an open book probably didn't have any friends. Sure, he probably liked the people in his book. But did they like him? No. Why? Because they aren't real.

My friends are real. They actually talk to me. Like just the other day my friend Bill said, "I'm not reading your e-mail for you anymore. You need to learn how to read." And I said, "Bill, if you don't read me my e-mail, I won't sign an autograph for your son." And Bill was, like, "Well, go fuck yourself. I'm going back to the hospital." Bill's son, Bill, Jr., or Billy Bob, was in the children's unit there. He didn't read the label on the box of his Sticky Stones™, and when he swallowed three of the iron-ore magnets they fused into a chain along the wall of his esophagus. Bill, Sr., felt extra bad because he hadn't read that a consumer safety group had placed the Sticky Stones™ on its annual list of the ten worst toys. I told Bill that's life. That stuff happens when you are doing stuff. In life. Real life. If I had told you that what had happened to Billy Bob had happened in a book, you would have said no way, that would never happen, that's fiction. But it did. Because I told you it did.

Now, don't get me wrong. There are a few books that I am a fan of. Matchbooks are good. A lot of people are under the impression that books burn only at a specific temperature. But it's just not true. I can burn most books at or below 451 degrees Fahrenheit. Sometimes below 300, if I soak the jacket in lighter fluid.

I also like MacBooks. You can really do stuff on them, you know. Like see how many followers you have on Twitter, or take pictures of yourself with Photo Booth, or play Second Life, or check if Bill has checked your e-mail. I miss Bill. He set up my Facebook account on my MacBook. I've got my own page on there. I have more than a million fans. Do you know how many fans Books have? Twenty-five thousand seven hundred and sixty-four. That's it. So I'm not alone here. You know what else has more fans than Books? The Olive Garden. One hundred and eighty-five thousand nine hundred and eighty-six. What else? Sleep: over three hundred thousand. More people would rather be unconscious than read a book. Now, I'm not condoning sleep. I'm about doing stuff. Living life. But it just goes to show that I'm in the majority.

Right now you're probably wondering, Hey, why is this guy, a proud non-reader of books, writing this? Isn't this a Catch-22? And I say no, it's not. It's a Catch-23. What's a Catch-23? It's like a Catch-22, except there is no catch. I don't want you to read this. In fact, you should stop reading right now. Seriously. Stop reading this. Start doing stuff. What kind of stuff, you ask? I don't know. Why don't you go to the Olive Garden? But just watch out. They give you the never-ending salad before the never-ending pasta bowl. You wouldn't think so, but the salad fills you right up. The lettuce is mostly iceberg. All water. And the waiter really makes you feel like shit when you don't make it to the fettucine Alfredo.

Sometimes when I don't know what to do I imagine other people doing stuff. But like people in a different time. Or like people in a different place. And I think how cool would it be to be that person for awhile. Like to know how other people I don't know talk or do stuff. How they really live, you know? But that's when I'm not doing stuff of my own. Which is all the time anyway. ♦

ANNALS OF GASTRONOMY

THE SCAVENGER

Pig's ear, octopus, and fish-kidney curry with L.A.'s most adventurous eater.

BY DANA GOODYEAR

For nearly twenty-five years, Jonathan Gold, the high-low priest of the Los Angeles food scene, has been chronicling the city's carts and stands and dives and holes-in-mini-malls; its Peruvian, Korean, Uzbek, Isaan Thai, and Islamic Chinese restaurants; the places that serve innards, insects, and extremities. He tells his readers where to get crickets, boiled silkworm cocoons, and fried grasshoppers ("The mellow, pecanlike flavor isn't bad"). On their behalf, he eats hoof and head and snout, and reveals, before the Census Bureau does, which new populations have come to town, and where they are, and what they're cooking up. In April, he announced a recent migration from Mexico's Distrito Federal. How did he know? You could now get D.F.-style *carnitas* in Highland Park, "loose and juicy, spilling out of the huge $1.99 tacos like Beyoncé out of a tight jumpsuit." It was the same month that the Centers for Disease Control confirmed the first two U.S. cases of swine flu, both in California. Gold recommended the *tacos de nana*—pig uterus—"chewy yet forgiving, pink and yet not, whorled in swoops and paisley shapes that defy Euclidean geometry."

Two years ago, Gold won the Pulitzer Prize for criticism, a first for a food writer, and a first for his home paper, the free, alternative *L.A. Weekly*. He abides by George Orwell's rule of thumb: the fancier the restaurant, the more people who have dripped sweat into your food. Interesting cuisine, he believes, often comes out of poverty. "I have my thing," he says. "Traditional—I hate the word 'ethnic'—restaurants that serve some actual hunger people have, rather than something they tell themselves they *must* have." He sees Los Angeles as "the anti-melting pot"—the home of true, undiluted regional cookery—but also has a fondness for what he calls the "triple carom": the Cajun seafood restaurant that caters to Chinese customers and is run by Vietnamese from Texas. Gold is read by chefs (Nancy Silverton, Michael Cimarusti, Wolfgang Puck), and by food nerds in their thirties who live in Silver Lake and Echo Park and spend their weekends retracing his steps. There are people who consider "Counter Intelligence," a collection of Gold's columns that was published in 2000, one of the great contemporary books about Los Angeles. Several years ago, after giving a lecture at Pitzer College, Gold was approached by a CalTech geneticist, whose food hobby had once extended to cooking up specimens over the Bunsen burner in his lab, and who could recite long passages from reviews that Gold had written a decade before. They became great friends.

Javier Cabral, who writes the blog Teenage Glutster (subtitle: "Food, Adolescence, Angst, Hormones and a Really, Really Fast Metabolism"), is one of Gold's most devoted fans. He lives with his parents, first-generation immigrants from Mexico, in East Los Angeles. Under Gold's influence, the Glutster, who used to eat at fast-food chains daily, began to seek out the traditional specialties of his neighborhood, like *birria* (goat stew), which he had never tried before. He started the blog in 2005, when he was sixteen and a junior in high school. "I learned from Jonathan Gold that food writing doesn't need to be so hosh-posh, snobby, and froufrou," the Glutster told me. "It can be ghetto."

Last year, the Glutster's mother took him to a healing mass at La Iglesia Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, his local parish, in the hope that it would cure him of his fascination with food, which she finds worrisome. He left before the service ended, and, taking a walk around the neighborhood, came upon the day's true "revelation," as he put it on his blog: a Oaxacan spot, Moles la Tia, that served twenty varieties of mole. Later, Gold reviewed the restaurant, in the style that has come to be his signature, a postmod-

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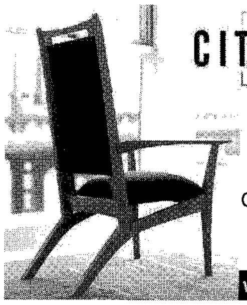

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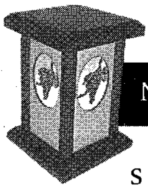

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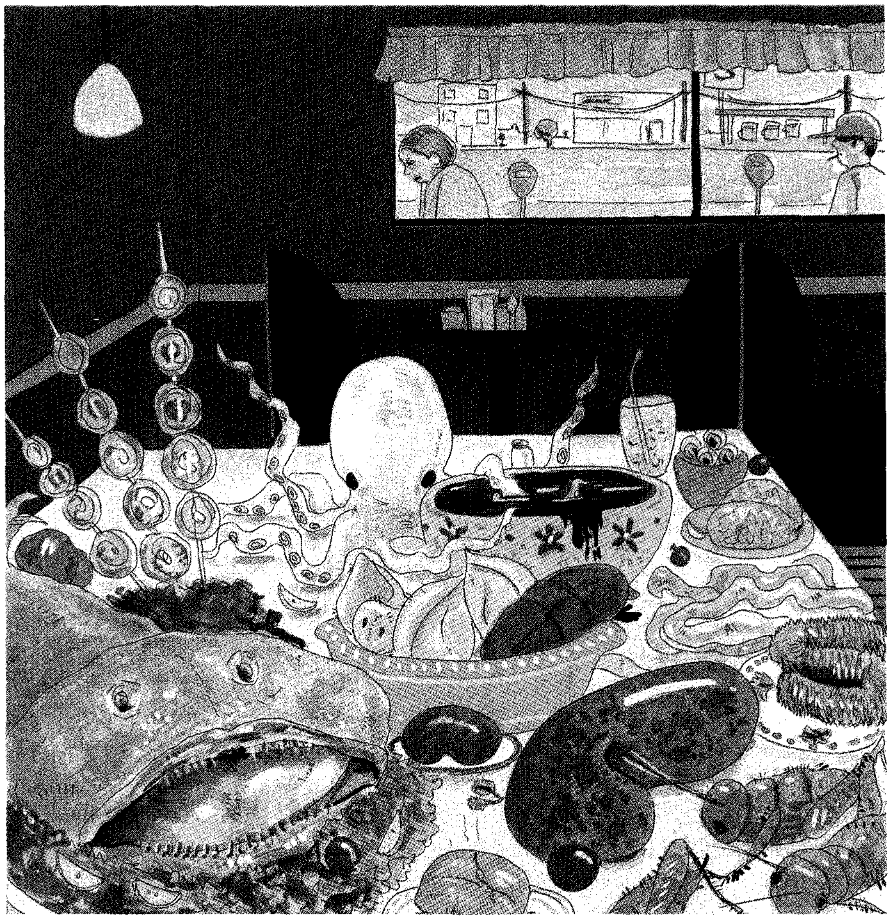
ern scrapbook of divergent references that run with the internal logic of a dream. The mole *negro*, he wrote, is "so dark that it seems to suck the light out of the airspace around it, spicy as a *novela* and bitter as tears." Further, it "appears so glossy and rich that I am always tempted to test its consistency by stabbing an index finger into it, and the resulting stain lingers as long as the empurpled digits of patriotic Iraqi voters." And, finally, "The last time I was as inspired by glossy black, it was part of Charles Ray's infamous sculpture *Ink Box*, and it was enshrined in a major museum of art." In the column, Gold also mentioned the Teenage Glutster, thereby putting him on the food-blogging map.


Jonathan Gold eats as if his manhood depended on it—he fears only scrambled eggs.

LARA TOMLIN

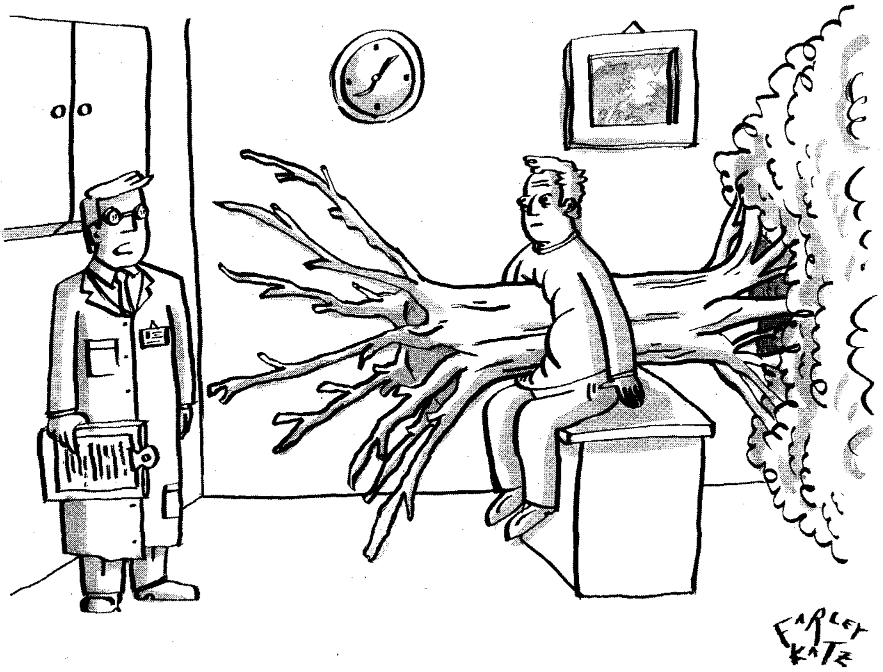
Gold's jackets, snug and black and leather, encase him like the skin around a boudin noir, which, being pig-derived, is among his favorite foods. Lately, he has been wearing a small close-cropped mustache, and his hair, a graying red cascade, curls over his shoulders. His skin is fair and freckled; his eyes—twitchy, restless—are blue. When, starting in 1999, he went to New York for a few years to be a restaurant critic at *Gourmet*, maître d's around the city hastened to get a bead on his appearance. The word went out: "Biker." Gold has been mistaken for the chef Jonathan Waxman—"Another hairy Californian," he says—and for Mario Batali, though, according to him, "I'm much better-looking than Mario." His hip-hop name, given to him by Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre, is Nervous Cuz. (Gold was a music journalist in the eighties and nineties.) He is sly and erudite, withdrawn in person and in print exuberant. The avant-garde composer Carl Stone, who has titled many of his pieces after restaurants that Gold has introduced him to, considers him the S. J. Perelman of food.

Gold is forty-nine, and grew up in South Central. His mother, Judith, was the librarian at a rough public school, a witty, lively woman who had been a magician's assistant and a minor theatre actress; his father, Irwin, an aspiring academic, studied under Richard Ellmann but got polio before he could finish his dissertation. He became a probation officer; Roman Polanski was one of his cases. (The filmmakers behind the recent documentary "Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired" used Irwin's copious, finely written probation report in their research.) He was passionate about classical music, literature, and comfort food (Chicago-style hot dogs, all-you-can-eat buffets, lunch-counter burgers); aiming to please him, Jonathan, the oldest of three sons, took up cello, reading, and eating. He failed to win his father's approval: Irwin claimed never to have read Jonathan's columns. After his father died, Jonathan cleaned out Irwin's car and found a complete file of his work in the trunk and Verdi's "Requiem" in the tape deck.

At sixteen, Gold left the house. It was the late seventies; he stayed with friends and, he says, in the months before the Iranian Revolution, squatted in Beverly Hills houses that had been bought but not yet occupied by families from Tehran. On the strength of his cello playing, he went to U.C.L.A., where, for a time, he lived in his practice room. The music professors at U.C.L.A. didn't like him much: his compositions tended to involve homeless people swearing into microphones. He plugged in his cello and started playing it in a punk band.

During his freshman year, Gold took a course in cultural geography and was assigned to make an ethnic map of a block of Beverly Boulevard not far from downtown. At a laundromat, he saw Salvadorans saving dryers for Salvadorans, and overheard Mexicans who spoke not Spanish but Nahuatl. The 7-Eleven, he noticed, was owned by Koreans. As luck would have it, the block included Shibucho—one of the first Japanese restaurants, Gold says, to expel patrons for ordering California rolls—and he tried sushi. Later, for a class that he took with the performance artist Chris Burden, Gold made a piece that involved going to every Jewish deli in the city and buying two water bagels using only pennies; one he ate and one he saved to hang behind plastic on the studio wall. This was how he discovered that all the good delis in Los Angeles had a single bagel source: the Brooklyn Bagel Bakery, started in 1953 by immigrants from New York.

After leaving U.C.L.A., Gold was living on Pico Boulevard, above a kosher butcher in an Iranian Jewish en-



"Actually, this is the one condition your insurance does cover."

* * *

clave, and working at a legal newspaper downtown. Taking the bus east on Pico every day, he passed through Korean, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Oaxacan, and Jaliscan areas. As an experiment, he set out to try every restaurant—places that served *pupusas*, chili fries, Korean barbecue—along the boulevard. He gave himself a year, at the end of which he planned to join the Foreign Service, so that he could go off and have adventures in the world. When he was finished eating Pico, he realized that he could have just as exotic a life without ever leaving Los Angeles.

One day, Gold stopped off at the Brooklyn Bagel Bakery, which is in the part of Echo Park that is now known as Historic Filipinotown. He got four water bagels and three salt; one water bagel went into his cup holder, for noshing. He had just had a so-so Guatemalan meal (chiles rellenos, tamales, pounded-pumpkin-seed stew, and *kakik de gallina*, a chicken dish that he'd never seen on a menu before), and was on the way to Mama's Hot Tamales, off MacArthur Park, near Langer's deli (the source of the city's best pastrami). "This is one of the gnarlier, gnarlier drug zones in L.A.," he said, circling Mama's block. "I was here with my mother, on our way to Langer's, and people were trying to sell her crack." An apartment where he lived for ten years, until the 1992 riots trashed the neighborhood and he moved to Pasadena, was just a couple of miles away. At Mama's, he ate a chicken tamale with red sauce, and a pork tamale with green. He took a pound of coffee beans to go, and swung back west, to hit a Peruvian restaurant owned by Koreans that sits in a median, next to a car wash, and specializes in spit-roasted chicken and grilled beef heart. "It's not the *best* grilled beef heart you've ever had," he said. He was picking up a chicken for supper and, since he was there, ordered a fermented-corn drink and half a chicken to stay.

Gold eats at three to five hundred restaurants every year. "Food rewards obsessiveness," he says. His friend Robert Sietsema told me that, in the three years Gold was based in New York, Sietsema, who is the food critic for the *Village Voice* and presumably accustomed to eating a lot, gained twenty-five pounds. "We really put on the feed bag," he said. Not long ago, Sietsema said, Gold visited: "He and I went on a typical binge. We started with porchetta sandwiches, then went to David Chang's new bakery for foccaccia with kimchi, then we had salty-pistachio soft-serve ice cream, cookies, and coffee milk. Then we went to a pizzeria famous for its artichoke slice, where we also had a Sicilian slice, and then we took the train to Flushing and visited a new Chinese food court and had half a dozen Chinese dishes there. Then we went to the *old* food court down the street, visited three more stalls, and had a bunch of things, including lamb noodles, and then Jonathan had to go to dinner somewhere. After dinner, he stopped by my apartment, and we went to Ten Downing, where we ate another three-course dinner."

For years, Gold's itinerant eating seemed purposeless; then, suddenly, as with the hungry caterpillar in the Eric Carle book, there was a glorious, fully realized point to it. John Powers, a film critic who met Gold at the *Weekly* in the mid-eighties, when Gold was a proofreader there, says, "He has the flâneur instinct. In all those years, when his peers were very busy professionally writing, Jonathan was professionally wandering around *not* writing. By background, inclination, and practice, he has always been the one who knows the most stuff close to the ground."

At the *Weekly*, when Gold was in his mid-twenties, he met Laurie Ochoa, a beautiful, dark-haired intern who had just finished college, and wooed her with dollar seats for the L.A. Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, and a slice of his mother's peach pie. They got married, over a roast pig at Campanile, in 1990, and she has been his dining companion and first reader ever since. They went together to the Los Angeles *Times*, where she worked as an editor and writer under Ruth Reichl and he wrote restaurant reviews, and then to *Gourmet* (where she was the executive editor). When Ochoa was hired as the editor of the *Weekly*, in 2001, Gold came back, too. (Several months ago, Ochoa resigned under pressure from Village Voice Media, which owns the *Weekly*.) They have two children, Leon, who is six, and Isabel, fifteen. Isabel likes tentacles but can't abide anything spicy; Leon is in a protracted rice-and-chicken phase.

The formal rigor that Gold applied to his early eating jags has become a recurring motif. He likes a culinary picaresque, and often takes the kids. They have accompanied him on hot-dog, hot-chocolate, and gelato sprees. The day he decided to find the city's best espresso, he travelled with David Kendrick, who was then the drummer for Devo. After twenty-seven shots, Gold—sweating, trembling, and talking too loud—met up with Ochoa and some friends for dinner. He started to panic and begged the group not to get dessert. When Ochoa ordered tiramisu, he burst into tears, ran out of the restaurant, and took the bus home.

Gold drives twenty thousand miles a year in search of food. "I go into a fugue state, like the Aboriginal dreamtime, when you go on long, aimless walks in the outback," he says. "That's how I feel driving on the endless streets of Los Angeles County." Any given afternoon will find him in a green pickup truck, heading east from Pasadena into the far reaches of the San Gabriel Valley, an expansive territory of suburban cities and unincorporated towns, with an estimated population of two million people—one-fifth the population of the county.

Over the past thirty years, the San Gabriel Valley has transformed from a working-class white suburb of faded bowling alleys and German restaurants into a place where it is possible to live quite comfortably speaking nothing but Chinese. In the seventies, the San Gabriel city of Monterey Park was successfully pitched to wealthy Taiwanese as "the Chinese Beverly Hills"; by 1990, according to "The Ethnic Quilt," a book about the demographics of Southern California, the city was thirty-six per cent Chinese and known as Little Taipei. With the 1997 handover, well-capitalized Hong Kongers arrived, settling in Monterey Park and in the nearby towns of San Marino, Alhambra, Rosemead, and Arcadia. In the past year or two, Gold has noticed a surge of new restaurants serving very hot country-style food from Sichuan, a shift that he attributes to migration after the 2008 earthquake.

Eating in the San Gabriel Valley, Gold has observed that, unlike in New York, where immigrants quickly broaden and assimilate their cooking styles to reflect the city's collective idea of "Chinese food," the insular nature of Los Angeles allows imported regional cuisines to remain intact, traceable almost to the restaurant owners' villages of origin. "The difference is that in New York they're cooking for us," Gold told me. "Here they're cooking for themselves."

Not long ago, Gold alighted from his truck at a mini-mall in Rowland Heights, several towns beyond Monterey Park. "This is the rich Chinese neighborhood," he said. From his pocket he pulled the folded-up flap of an envelope, which was covered with tips and notes scrawled haphazardly in pencil. He wanted to try No. 1 Noodle House, where the specialty is Saliva Chicken—"So hot it makes your mouth water, which is the best of all possible reasons it might be called that," he said. He had learned about the restaurant in the Chinese-language Yellow Pages. Gold doesn't speak or read any language but English; he has strong deductive skills, and Google Translate helps.

The noodle shop was closed. Gold consulted his notes, and drove across the street to another mini-mall, where there was a Sichuan restaurant with a string of red chilies draped over the door and a "B" in the window, a grade given by the county health inspector, and posted by law. (Gold subscribes to the rating system whereby "A" stands for American Chinese, "B" is Better Chinese, and "C" is Chinese food for Chinese, but admits that, for years before the grading system was in place, he walked around with constant low-level food poisoning.) He sat down and perused a menu that had been awkwardly translated into English: "Steamed Toad" was the name of one entrée. The waitress came, and he pointed to dam-dam noodles, dumplings, wontons, pork, and a fish special. From a cold case, he chose pig's ear.

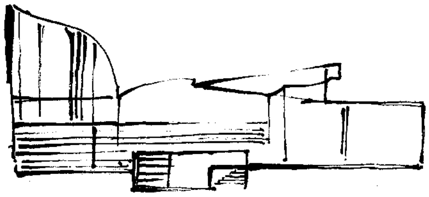
"*Cha*, please," he said, ordering tea.

"Huh?" the waitress said.

"*Cha*—tea," he said.

"Oh, *tea*."

The fish arrived, blue-lipped and bathed in chilies and oil. "Spicy," Gold said, tasting it. "The dumplings are good, too. And I suspect they smoke their own pork here. It's good, but I don't think it's enough better than the other good Sichuan place, which is twenty miles closer to L.A." The food was heavy. "They're cooking the peasant version of these dishes," he said. "Oil is a sign of generosity."



Before heading back, Gold wanted to check out a fast-food restaurant called Malan, in yet another mini-mall. "This place in China is the equivalent of McDonald's," he said as he approached the door. "It's the biggest chain, and it's owned by a big petroleum company. The noodles it serves are a specialty of Lanzhou, which is known for being one of the most polluted cities in China—and for its hand-pulled noodles." Inside, Gold sat down and ordered a couple of bowlfuls—large round noodles in beef broth, noodles with brown sauce. The kitchen was visible from the dining area. "Note the Mexican guy rolling out the dough and tossing the noodles," he said, tucking into his soup. "I don't know why, but that always makes me extremely happy."

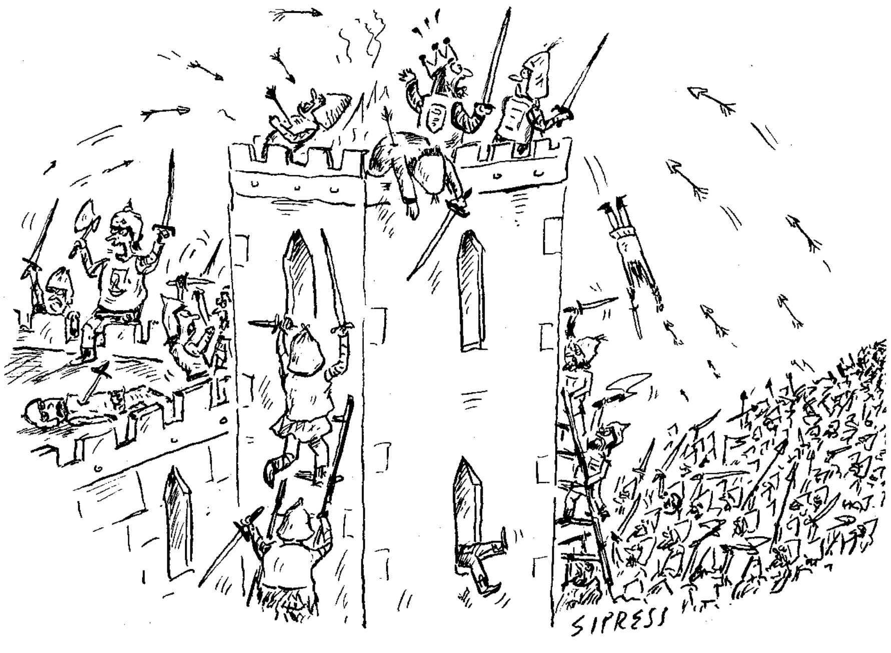
In a fancy restaurant, Gold will wear a rumpled suit and a soft bluish button-down and pay with a credit card issued in the name of his high-school algebra teacher. He has special cell-phone numbers that he uses just for reservations. "It's like 'The Bourne Identity' in slow motion," he says.

Reviewing the high end was always part of Gold's mandate. The first piece he wrote for a "slick"—the now defunct *California Magazine*, edited by Harold Hayes—was a review of Chasen's, which had been an entertainment-industry staple for fifty years. To Gold, it reeked of Reaganomics and other things that he despised. He wrote that it was "a swell place to celebrate a seventy-fifth birthday or a *contra* incursion," and that the famous chili was "distinguishable from a bowl of Dennison's only by a couple of chunks of sirloin, a 1,600 percent price differential and three guys"—the servers—"who look like they stepped out of a 1935 gangster B-movie." He has his regrets. "Although I didn't do Chasen's in"—it was around for another decade—"I certainly put a lance in its side," he says. "But, looking back, I really miss Chasen's. And kiwi vinaigrette and magical caviar snakes and braised cantaloupe with black-corn fungus and all the things I thought were the future back then—a lot of that food was just silly."

In 1990, Gold started writing about Renu Nakorn, an Isaan Thai place twenty miles southeast of downtown, next to a working dairy farm. After his reviews, large numbers of white people started coming in. They ordered what he had ordered: slimy bamboo salads, fermented fish, and intensely spicy dishes—authentic regional Thai food that the owners, Bill and Saipin Chutima, were worried the customers would send back. Jeffrey Steingarten, the food critic for *Vogue*, made a pilgrimage (the Chutimas said that his postprandial cigar was disrupted by the stench of cows), and so did Mark Bittman, of the New York *Times*. When the Chutimas moved to Las Vegas and opened a new place, Lotus of Siam, Gold called it the best Thai restaurant in North America; this year, Saipin, who does the cooking, was nominated for a James Beard award. Gold put it this way once: "As the Italians say of Christopher Columbus, when he discovered America it stayed discovered."

To Gold's readers, his reviews have the ontological status that the New York *Times* has for people interested in current events: he doesn't write about it because it is; it *is* because he's written about it. In March, he published a column titled "The New Cocktailians," about a movement of bartenders who dress like punk-rock dandies (suspenders and tattoos) and treat drinks as a culinary art, shopping at farmers' markets for fresh produce and educating customers about the origins of the gin fizz. By fall, all food-minded Los Angeles understood, without knowing exactly how or why it knew, that a cocktail moment was in full swing.

Last month, Gold hosted a benefit event at Union Station, the train depot downtown. There were concoctions from new cocktailians (Manhattans made with Luxardo cherries, champagne drinks with absinthe-citrus foam), paired with morsels from some of Gold's favorite highbrow places: pig sliders and pigs' ears from a sleek bistro; pork terrine from Palate, in Glendale; bacon-wrapped matzo balls from the winner of "Top Chef," season two. The food nerds were out in force: bloggers from the local sites that track Gold's every move. Neil Kohan—thirty-one, receding hair, camera slung over his shoulder—sipped a Manhattan and declared Gold the Thom Yorke of food writing. (His blog, Food Marathon, chronicles his eating itineraries, many of them heavily informed by Gold.) The author of the blog The Delicious Life urged Gold to try her Chivas Mamie Taylor—Chivas Regal twelve-year-old Scotch, ginger syrup, fresh lime juice, soda water, and crushed ice, also made from Chivas Regal. He sipped. "It's delicious," he said. "But something about it tastes a little like pool water, too." She was delighted. That was just the kind of thing that only Jonathan Gold would say.



"It's not fair—they have a much bigger payroll!"

Gold guzzled hot sauce as a kid, and he still eats as if his manhood depended on it. (The only thing he fears is scrambled eggs.) A few months ago, writing about a Muslim-style Koreatown restaurant—"a nondescript corner dining room where northeastern Chinese cooks prepare the Beijing version of Xinxiang barbecue for a Korean-speaking clientele"—Gold recommended what he called "the winciest dish in town: a sharp, glistening steel skewer stabbed through thin coins of meat sliced from a bull penis, which bubble and hiss when they encounter the heat of the fire, sizzling from proud quarters to wizened, chewy dimes." It was straight onomatopoeia, with a floater of tonic: "It doesn't taste like much, this bull penis, pretty much just cartilage and char, but the spectacle is as emasculating as a Jonas Brothers CD."

Gold suspects that he has encouraged those he calls the "dining-as-sport" crowd: "I'll see your live octopus and raise you a chicken foot. Oh, so you're going to eat small intestine full of undigested cow's milk?" He's right. An avid reader, once laid up for two weeks after eating Korean beef-liver sashimi at a restaurant recommended by Gold, told me, "I feel that, because he's willing to eat this stuff, it's almost like a dare. I have to try it, even if it's horrifying."

The other night, the stunt dish was *san nak ji*, live octopus, in a divey strip-mall restaurant with a mermaid on the sign and a Korean golf show on the television set. Gold said he thought that the space had once been occupied by Alex Donut, which was one of three places in town to get Thai food in the late seventies. "There's a huge tradition in L.A. of Southeast Asians, mostly Cambodians, making doughnuts," he said. "There's nothing Southeast Asian about doughnuts, but one guy came over and opened a doughnut shop, and then they all started coming from Phnom Penh to do it."

Korean sashimi came to the table—big hunks of white tuna, with the taste and texture of chilled butter; fresh-killed halibut—along with sea squirts and pickled mackerel eggs. Then the proprietor produced the main event, a plate of slippery gray tentacles, wiggling anxiously. "It'll try to climb up the chopstick," Gold said, dousing a tentacle in sesame oil to loosen the grip of its suckers. "I don't actually know that much about octopus physiology. Most people say that the octopus is dead, and just twitching, but I don't know. It looks pretty alive to me." (Gold's youngest brother, Mark, runs the marine conservation organization Heal the Bay; needless to say, he finds Jonathan's eating habits atrocious.)

Gold bit into the octopus. "I thought I was completely full from lunch, but this is invigorating food," he said. More courses came—broiled eel and broths and a greasy red kimchi pancake and, finally, crab claws covered in a sticky glaze, lustrous as a ceramic sculpture by Jeff Koons.

In a Hollywood mini-mall with a red mansard roof, next to a Thai video store, a Thai barber, and a Thai spa, is a restaurant called Jitlada. For decades, it was known as a respectable place to get decent Thai food. Then, in the spring of 2007, a visiting Chicagoan discovered that Jitlada had an untranslated menu of hard-to-find southern-Thai specialties—sour oxtail soup, dried-mudfish curry, pickled-crab salad—which had been added by the brother and sister, Suthiporn (Tui) Sungkamee and Jazz Singsanong, who had recently taken over the restaurant. The Chicagoan posted an English-language version of the southern-Thai menu on a Chicago Web site, creating a sensation in the food-blogging world.

Gold, naturally, got wind of it, and went to try the special menu for himself. On one visit, he brought Carl Stone, the composer. They ordered *kua kling*, a dry-beef curry, and asked for it "Bangkok hot." (Stone carries a card in his wallet that says, more or less, in Thai, "Yes, I know I'm not Thai, but please give me the food as spicy as I request.")

Jazz, a voluble woman, came over to their table and started chatting. All she needed to make the restaurant a success, she said, was for Jonathan Gold to review it; she had been praying in her Buddha room every day for him to walk through the door. Did they know him, or know what he looked like? she asked. Stone says, "I was going to throw out a red herring—'He's tall and thin with a full head of hair'—but Jonathan started laughing and introduced himself." Gold, in his review, praised the "delicious, foul-smelling yellow curries" and the "strange, mephitic fragrances" of wild tea leaves and stinky beans, and said that Jitlada was "the most exciting new Thai restaurant of the year."

The other day, Gold went to Jitlada for a late lunch. Jazz, dressed all in black, with heavy golden medallions around her neck, made a fuss when she saw him. "I miss you!" she said. She shuttled him to a table in the back, where it was cool and quiet, and brought him a big Thai beer. Dishes started coming from the kitchen before Gold had a chance to ask for them: pork curry and papaya salad and fish-kidney curry. "People from Thailand were in here in the morning, ordering kidney," Jazz said. "I thought of you."

Gold started to reminisce about the spiciness of the spiciest *kua kling* that Jazz had ever served him, the first day they met. "It was glowing, practically incandescent," he said. "You bite into it and every alarm in your body goes off at once. It's an overload on your pain receptors, and then the flavors just come through. It's not that the hotness overwhelms the dish, which is what people who don't understand Thai cooking always say, but that the dish is revealed for the first time—its flavor—as you taste details of fruit and turmeric and spices that you didn't taste when it was merely extremely hot. It's like a hallucination."

Jazz went into the kitchen and, a few minutes later, returned with a round platter, laden with big tear-shaped leaves, minced onion, tiny lime wedges, fresh ginger, toasted coconut, green chilies, and dried shrimp, arranged in a pinwheel pattern. In the middle was a thick, sweet palm-sugar sauce. Jazz took a leaf and made Gold a perfect little tangy, fishy, tart, hot, candylike bundle. "The sauce is so good," he said.

"I just made it," Jazz said.

"It's beyond brilliant," Gold said, sincerely. "Can you put it on the menu?" ♦

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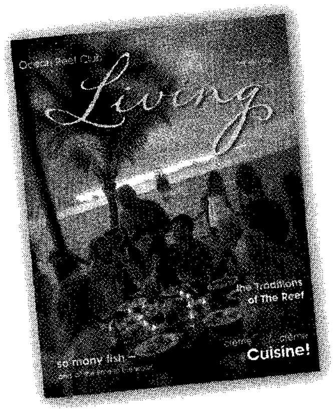

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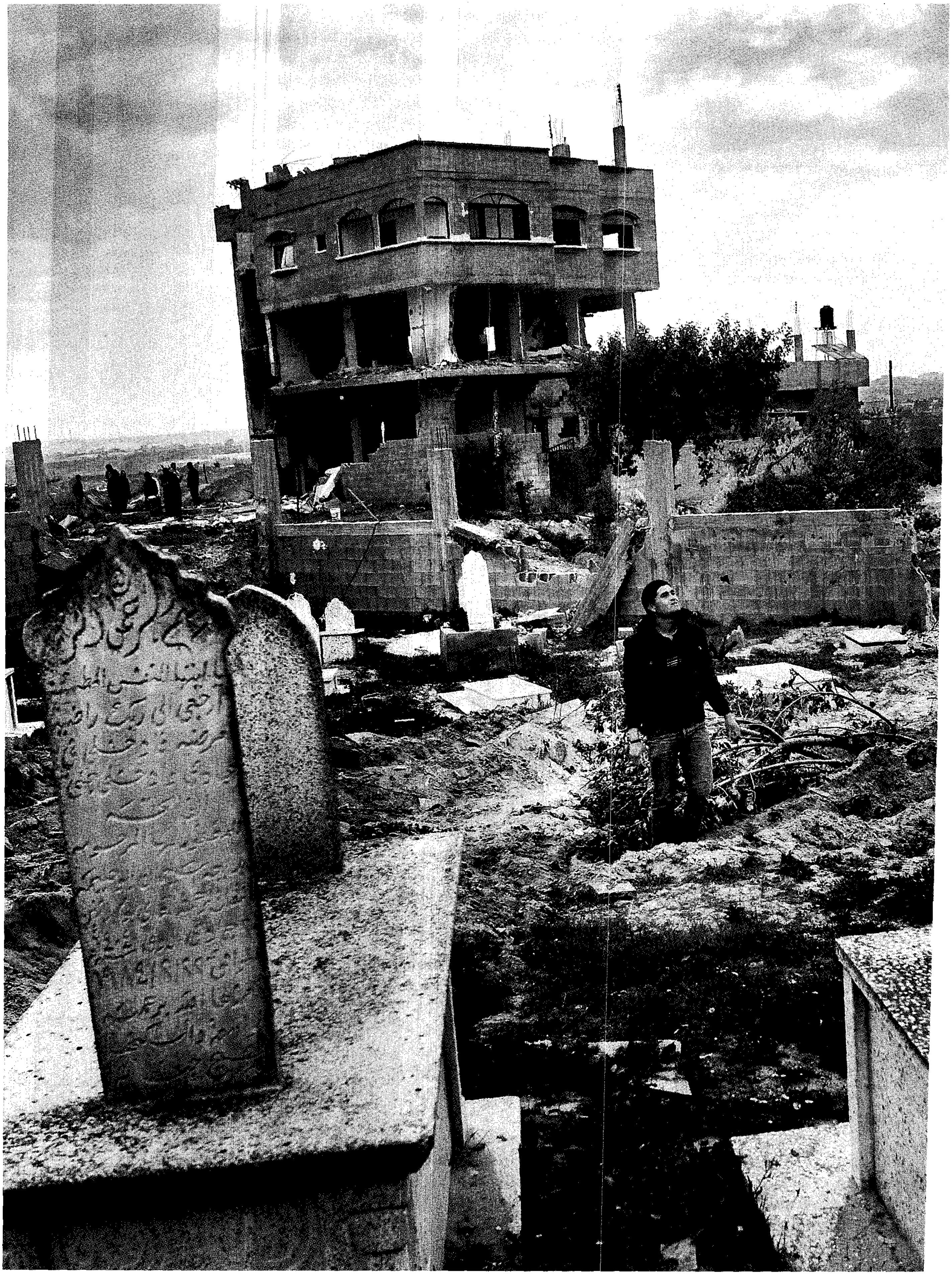


BERLINGSKE MEDIA

A young man looks for his mother's grave in a cemetery in Beit Lehia that was destroyed by tanks in January. Israel's three-week-lo

LETTER FROM GAZA

CAPTIVES

What really happened during the Israeli attacks?

BY LAWRENCE WRIGHT

الفاتحة
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
يا أيتها النفس
المطمئنة ارجعي
الى ربك راضية
مرضية فادخلي
في عبادي
وادخلي جنتي

ck has given rise to charges of war crimes on both sides. Photograph by Christian Als.

In southwest Israel, at the border of Egypt and the Gaza Strip, there is a small crossing station not far from a kibbutz named Kerem Shalom. A guard tower looms over the flat, scrubby buffer zone. Gaza never extends more than seven miles wide, and the guards in the tower can see the Mediterranean Sea, to the north. The main street in Gaza, Salah El-Deen Road, runs along the entire twenty-five-mile span of the territory, and on a clear night the guards can watch a car make the slow journey from the ruins of the Yasir Arafat International Airport, near the Egyptian border, toward the lights of Gaza City, on the Strip's northeastern side. Observation balloons hover just outside Gaza, and pilotless drones freely cross its airspace. Israeli patrols tightly enforce a three-mile limit in the Mediterranean and fire on boats that approach the line. Between the sea and the security fence that surrounds the hundred and forty square miles of Gaza live a million and a half Palestinians.

Every opportunity for peace in the Middle East has been led to slaughter, and at this isolated desert crossing, on June 25, 2006, another moment of promise culminated in bloodshed. The year had begun with tumult. That January, Hamas, which the U.S. government considers a terrorist group, won Palestine's parliamentary elections, defeating the more moderate Fatah Party. Both parties sent armed partisans into the streets, and Gaza verged on civil war. Then, on June 9th, a tentative truce between Hamas and Israel ended after an explosion on a beach near Gaza City, apparently caused by an Israeli artillery shell, killed seven members of a Palestinian family, who were picnicking. (The Israelis deny responsibility.) Hamas fired fifteen rockets into Israel the next day. The Israelis then launched air strikes into Gaza for several days, killing eight militants and fourteen civilians, including five children.

Amid this strife, Mahmoud Abbas—the head of Fatah, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, the governing body established by the Oslo peace accords of 1993—put forward a bold idea. The people of Palestine, he declared, should be given the chance to vote on a referendum for a two-state solution to its conflict with Israel. Perhaps it was a cynical political maneuver, as the leaders of Hamas believed. The fundamental platform of Hamas was its refusal to accept Israel's right to exist, yet polls showed that Palestinians overwhelmingly supported the concept of two states. A referendum would be not only a rebuke to Hamas; it also would be a signal to Israel—and to the rest of the world—that Palestinians were determined to make peace. Abbas set the referendum for July.

Just before dawn on June 25th, eight Palestinian commandos crawled out of a tunnel into a grove of trees in Kerem Shalom. A new moon was in the sky, making it the darkest night of the month. With mortar fire and anti-tank missiles providing cover, the commandos, some of them disguised in Israeli military uniforms, split into three teams. One team attacked an empty armored personnel carrier, which had been parked at the crossing as a decoy. Another team hit the observation tower. The two Israelis in the tower were injured, but not before they killed two of the attackers.

The third team shot a rocket-propelled grenade into a Merkava tank that was parked on a berm facing the security fence. The explosion shook the tank; then its rear hatch opened and three soldiers tried to flee. Two of them were shot and killed, but a third, lightly wounded, was captured. The attackers raced back into Gaza with their prize: a lanky teenager named Gilad Shalit.

Within days, the Israel Defense Forces, or I.D.F., had bombed the only power station in Gaza, cutting off electricity to tens of thousands of people. The borders were shut down as Israeli troops searched residential areas for Shalit, rounding up males older than sixteen. On June 29th, Israeli officials arrested sixty-four senior Palestinian officials, including a third of the Palestinian cabinet and twenty members of parliament. At least four hundred Gazans were killed over the next several months, including eighty-eight children. The Israelis lost six soldiers and four civilians. Israeli authorities promised not to leave the Strip until they recovered Shalit, but by November he still had not been found, and both sides declared a ceasefire. Nothing had been resolved. Another explosion was sure to come. Certainly, no one was talking about peace initiatives any longer, and that may well have been the goal of those who captured Shalit.

From the Israeli perspective, at least, the Gaza problem was supposed to have been solved in August, 2005, when Ariel Sharon, then the Prime Minister, closed down the Jewish settlements on the Strip and withdrew Israeli forces. The international community and the Israeli left wing applauded the move. But, almost immediately, mortar and rocket attacks from the Strip multiplied. Five months later, Hamas won its parliament victory. Ari Shavit, a prominent columnist for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, told me recently in Jerusalem, "We dismantled the settlements, and then we sat back and said, 'Let's have a new beginning.' What we got was rockets and Gilad Shalit. People became very angry, and Shalit becomes an icon of that frustration."

We were sitting in Restobar, a noisy café in downtown Jerusalem. Nearby, Shalit's parents and supporters maintain a tent; from this makeshift office, they lobby for Israel to release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in exchange for Shalit's freedom. Shalit had just graduated from high school when he began his compulsory military service. His father, Noam, has described him as "a shy boy with a nervous smile and a studious disposition," who loved basketball and excelled in physics. Two weeks after Shalit was captured, Hezbollah abducted two other Israeli soldiers, sparking thirty-four days of war in South Lebanon. In that instance, the captured soldiers were already dead; after the war, their remains were returned to Israel, in exchange for five Lebanese prisoners and the remains of hundreds of fighters. But Shalit is presumed to be alive, and his plight has driven Israel slightly mad. There are demonstrations, bumper stickers, and petition drives demanding his freedom. On Web sites and in newspapers, counters chronicle how long Shalit has been in captivity. "Israel is obsessed with Gilad Shalit in a way that no other nation in history has been obsessed with a prisoner of war," Shavit said.

Gaza is a place that Israel wishes it could ignore: the territory has long had the highest concentration of poverty, extremism, and hopelessness in the region. Gaza makes a mess of the idealized two-state solution because it is separated from the West Bank, the much larger Palestinian territory, not just physically but also culturally and politically. In 2005, the RAND Corporation proposed integrating a future Palestinian state with a high-speed rail and highway system that would connect the West Bank and Gaza. Former President Jimmy Carter told me that, in 2005, he and Ariel Sharon had agreed to promote a land swap between the Israelis and the Palestinians that would provide a corridor between the two halves of Palestine.

Such potential solutions have been poisoned by the frustration that both Israelis and West Bankers feel toward Gaza. The political distance between the two Palestinian entities has caused many Israelis to start talking of a three-state solution, rather than two. "Hamas in Gaza is a fact of life until further notice," Yossi Alpher, a political consultant and a former Mossad officer, observed. "All our ideas about dealing with them have failed." Shavit and other Israeli intellectuals have proposed that the Egyptians deed a portion of the Sinai to Gaza, to make the Strip more viable—"a semi-Dubai," as Shavit terms it. The Egyptians have expressed no interest. "Egypt's strategy for Gaza is to make sure it's Israel's problem," Alpher said.

Hamas, which was founded in Gaza during the intifada of 1987, has come to embody the fears that many Israelis hold about the Palestinians. Its charter declares, "There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by jihad." The document, which is in many respects absurd and reflects the intellectual isolation and conspiracy-fed atmosphere in Gaza at the time, cites the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," the anti-Semitic forgery, and links Zionism to the Freemasons, the Lions Club, and "other spying groups" that aim "to violate consciences, to defeat virtues, and to annihilate Islam." Part of the paradox of this conflict is that many Palestinians who firmly embrace the two-state solution have voted for Hamas.

In Restobar, Shavit pointed to a spot a few feet away. "In March, 2002, there was a beautiful twenty-five-year-old girl dead on the floor, right there," he said. A suicide bomber had targeted the café, which was then called Moment. That month, eighty-three Israeli civilians were killed by Palestinians. Jerusalem was in a panic. Shavit was living nearby at the time, and on the night of March 9th he heard the bomb explode.

Running to the café, he saw mutilated bodies scattered on the sidewalk. People had been blown across the street. The dead girl was lying near the doorway. Inside, at the bar, three young men were sitting upright on the stools, but they were all dead. "It was as if they were still drinking their beers," Shavit recalled. Eleven Israelis died, and more than fifty were injured. Hamas proclaimed it a "brave attack" intended to "avenge the Israeli massacres against our people."

The Hamas attacks derailed the peace process initiated by the Oslo accords and hardened many Israelis against the Palestinian cause. Photographs of Gazans celebrating the Moment bombing confirmed the dehumanized state of affairs. Gaza became "Hamastan" in the Israeli newspapers. In 2007, after Hamas solidified its control of Gaza, the Israeli government declared Gaza a "hostile entity," and began enforcing a blockade on a population that was already impoverished, isolated, and traumatized by years of occupation.

Hamas was not weakened by the blockade. Instead, the collective punishment strengthened its argument that Israel wanted to eliminate the Palestinians. The only thing that Gaza has that Israel wants is Gilad Shalit, but Hamas says that it will not free him until Israel releases fourteen hundred individuals, four hundred and fifty of whom have been convicted of terrorist killings, including the men who planned the Moment bombing.

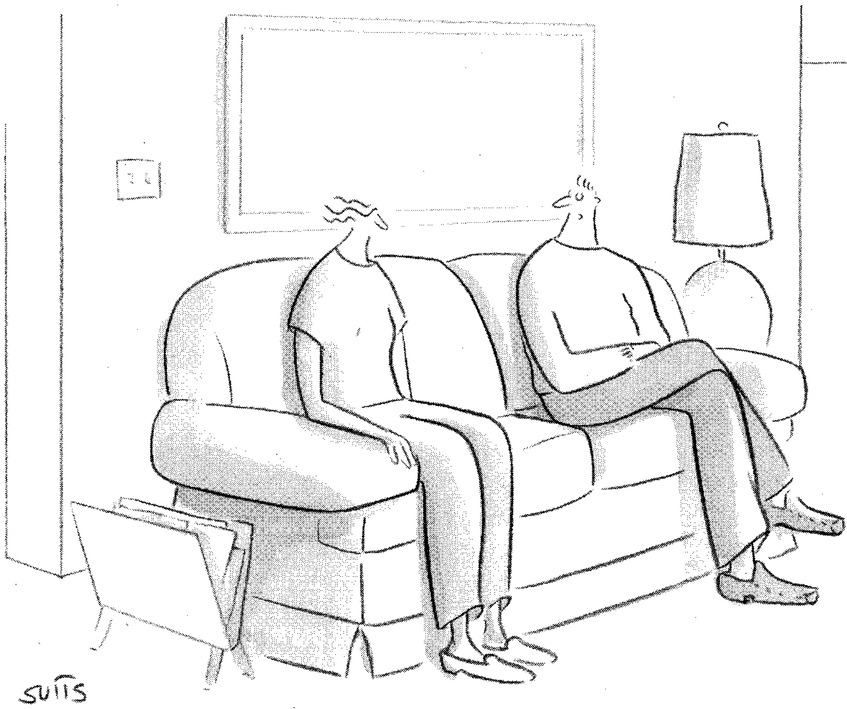
On June 25, 2007, several days after Hamas took over in Gaza, the captors of Gilad Shalit released an audio recording to prove that he was still alive. "It has been a year since I was captured and my health is deteriorating," he said. "I am in need of prolonged hospitalization." He urged the Israeli government to accept Hamas's demands for his release: "Just as I have a mother and father, the thousands of Palestinian prisoners also have mothers and fathers—and their children must be returned to them."

Gaza is a sea of children. The average woman there has 5.1 children, one of the highest birth rates in the world. More than half the population is eighteen or younger. "We love to reproduce," Khalil al-Hayya, a senior Hamas official, told me on a searingly hot July day, as hundreds of young boys in green caps shouted slogans at a Hamas summer camp. Hayya, a former professor of Islamic law, has six children; a seventh was killed by an Israeli bomb.

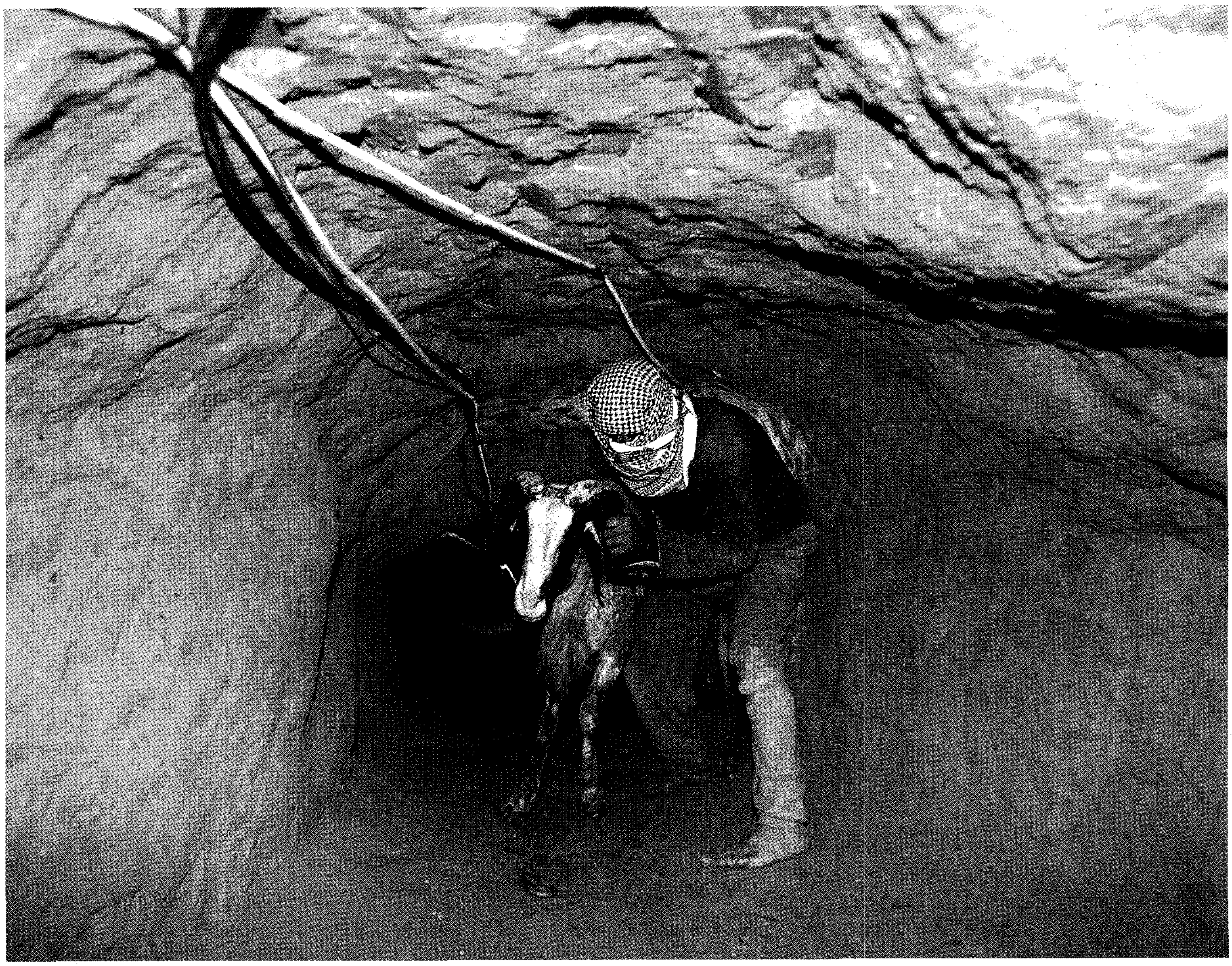
There is very little for children to do in Gaza. The Israeli blockade includes a ban on toys, so the only playthings available have been smuggled, at a premium, through tunnels from Egypt. Islamists have shut down all the movie theatres. Music is rare, except at weddings. Many of Gaza's sports facilities have been destroyed by Israeli bombings, including the headquarters for the Palestinian Olympic team. Only one television station broadcasts from Gaza, Al Aqsa—a Hamas-backed channel that gained notice last year for a children's show featuring a Mickey Mouse-like figure who was stabbed to death by an Israeli interrogator. The mouse was replaced by a talking bee, who died after being unable to cross into Egypt for medical treatment. The rabbit who followed the bee passed away in January, after being struck by shrapnel from an Israeli attack.

The main diversion for children is the beach, and on Fridays, after noon prayers, the shore is massed with families. Unlike the topaz waters off Tel Aviv, here the sea is murky, a consequence of twenty million gallons of raw and partially treated sewage that is dumped offshore every day. The main water-treatment plant is broken, and because of the blockade the spare parts that would fix it are unavailable. Fishermen with nets wade into the surf as kids romp in the stinking waves.

Israeli authorities maintain a list of about three dozen items that they permit into Gaza, but the list is closely kept and subject to change. Almost no construction materials—such as cement, glass, steel, or plastic pipe—have been allowed in, on the ground that such items could be used for building rockets or bunkers. While Hamas rocket builders and bomb-makers can smuggle everything they need through the secret tunnels, international aid organizations have to account for every brick or sack of flour. Operation Cast Lead—a three-week-long Israeli attack on Gaza, which began in December, 2008—has left Gaza in ruins. "Half a year after the conflict, we don't have a single bag of cement and not a pane of glass," John Ging, the director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees, told me in July. (Later that month, Israeli authorities announced that they would allow the U.N.R.W.A. a limited amount of steel and cement. Ging says that that has yet to happen.) Hu-



"If we're going to talk, can we at least have the TV blaring?"



Almost everything that enters or leaves the Strip goes through tunnels, including people and weapons. Photograph by Said Khatib.

AFP/GETTY

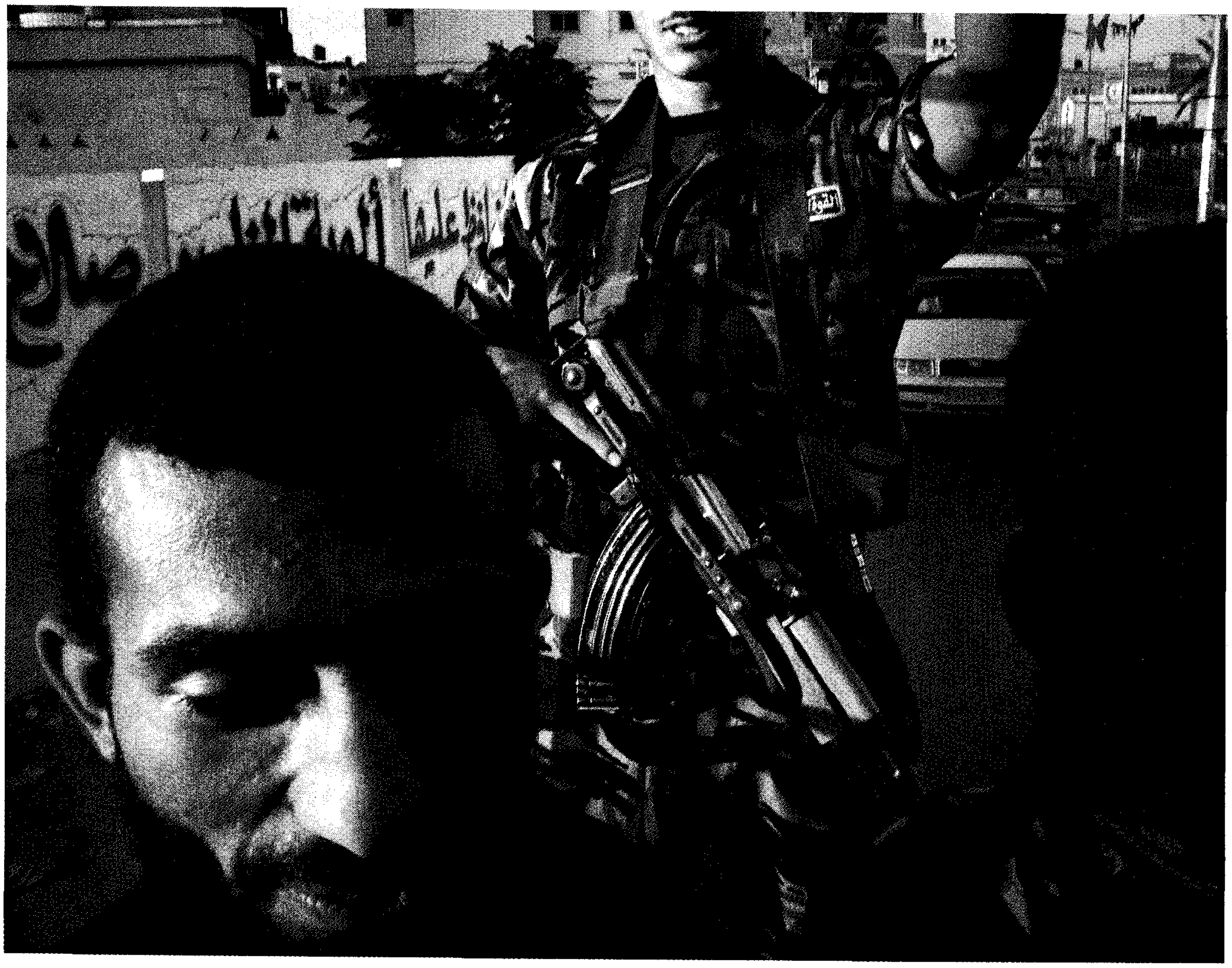
manitarian supplies that suddenly have been struck from Israel's list of approved items pile up in large storage warehouses outside the Kerem Shalom crossing, and international aid worth billions of dollars awaits delivery. "For the last two school years, Israeli officials have withheld paper for textbooks because, hypothetically, the paper might be hijacked by Hamas to print seditious materials," Ging complained. (Paper was finally delivered this fall.) When John Kerry, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Gaza in February of this year, he asked why pasta wasn't allowed in. Soon, macaroni was passing through the checkpoints, but jam was taken off the list. According to *Haaretz*, the I.D.F. has calculated that a hundred and six truckloads of humanitarian relief are needed every day to sustain life for a million and a half people. But the number of trucks coming into Gaza has fallen as low as thirty-seven. Israeli government officials have told international aid officials that the aim is "no prosperity, no development, no humanitarian crisis."

Visitors enter Gaza at its northeastern end, through the Erez Crossing—a high-security, barnlike building that is rarely congested, because scarcely any Palestinians are allowed to exit, and so few foreigners care to visit. In 2004, the first female suicide bomber for Hamas, Reem Riyashi, a twenty-two-year-old mother of two children, blew herself up there, killing four Israelis. Since then, the Israeli staff has largely been replaced by security cameras and remote-controlled gates.

In Gaza, the rocky hills of Jerusalem have been ironed into a sandy plain sparsely adorned with oleander and cactus, as in South Texas. The area near Erez used to be the region's industrial zone. Until Operation Cast Lead, there were several concrete plants, a flour mill, and an ice-cream factory, but they have all been bombed or bulldozed, and the mixing trucks for the concrete have been knocked over. Houses and mosques and shops lie in rubble; entire neighborhoods have been demolished. Israeli forces concentrated much of their fire, and their wrath, on northeast Gaza. From Erez, one can easily see Sderot, the Israeli town that has suffered the most rocket attacks.

There are eight refugee camps in Gaza, which form a society that is even more isolated that the larger gulag of the Strip. More than seventy per cent of Gazans are descendants of the two hundred thousand people who fled to the Strip in 1948, when the State of Israel was established. "I lived eighteen years of my life in a refugee camp," Ahmed Yousuf, the Deputy Foreign Minister, told me. "It was one square kilometre."

Gaza City is one of the oldest settlements in the world; it is thought to have been established by the Canaanites, around 3000 B.C. The boundaries of the modern Strip were determined after the 1949 armistice between Egypt and Israel.



Hamas militants in Gaza City. Hamas embodies Israeli fears about the Palestinians. Photograph by Tivadar Domaniczky.

VII NETWORK

Gaza marked the final redoubt of the Egyptian Army, and the armistice left a ribbon of coastal land, between three and seven miles wide, in Egypt's reluctant control. British authorities, who had once administered Gaza as part of their mandate over Palestine, considered Gaza *res nullius*—nobody's property. The Egyptians administered the territory until the 1967 war, when Israel captured the entire Sinai. Israel and Egypt agreed to try to set up a Palestinian entity that would rule Gaza, but it was clear that neither party wanted responsibility for the Strip, so it remained in limbo, little more than a notional part of a Palestinian entity that might never come into existence.

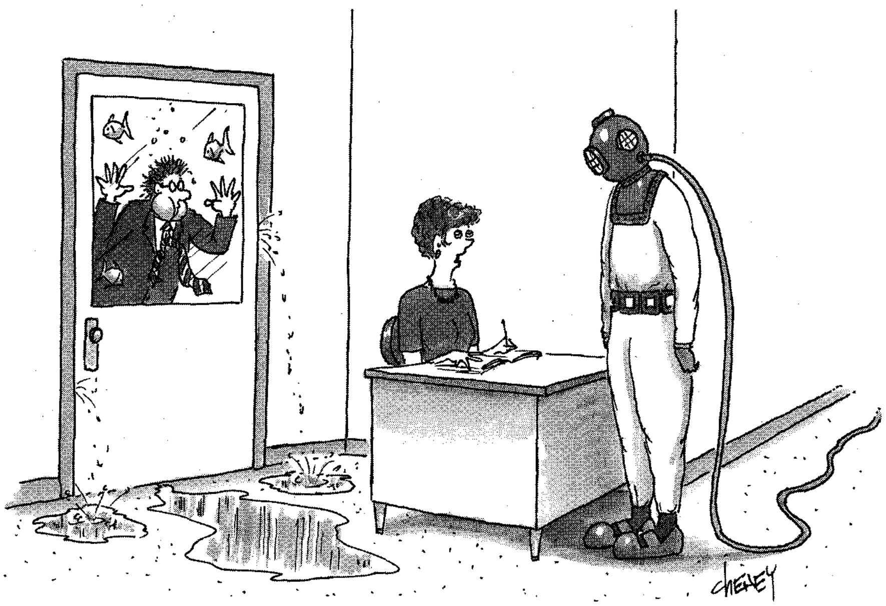
Gaza's status as a ward of someone else's state changed abruptly with the 2006 elections. Fatah, long the dominant force in the two Palestinian territories, had been expected to win easily, but this underestimated popular resentment against a party that was notoriously corrupt, incompetent, and so careless that it ran several candidates for identical offices. On the ballot, Hamas called itself the List of Change and Reform, although voters knew whom they were voting for. Polls had predicted that Hamas would receive about thirty per cent of the vote; instead, it won a decisive majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council.

International organizations declared that in order for Hamas to be accepted it would have to recognize the State of Israel, renounce violence, and respect extant diplomatic agreements. Hamas rebuffed those conditions, triggering a drastic cutoff of aid. Israel was further shaken when Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister, suffered a debilitating stroke. (He remains in a coma.) His replacement, Ehud Olmert, declared that the Palestinian government was becoming a "terrorist authority," and that the Israelis would have no contact with it.

Fatah refused to step aside and let Hamas govern. For months, there were large demonstrations by both factions in the West Bank and Gaza, along with kidnappings, gun battles, and assassinations. In March, 2007, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia arranged a peace accord, but it was merely a prelude to open civil war in Gaza, three months later. During six bloody days in June, Hamas swept aside the American-trained Fatah security force and took over the government that it had been elected to lead the previous year.

These clashes left Palestinians wondering if the differences between their major parties could ever be resolved. The residue is particularly bitter in Gaza. "We are crowded into a very small space," Yehia Rabah, a member of Fatah and a former Ambassador to Yemen, said. "The hate doesn't dissolve very easily. We see each other every day."

Although the new Prime Minister of Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, emphasized that Hamas had no intention of making Gaza an Islamic state, it took over the judiciary, appointing Islamist judges who impose Sharia on the court system. I was repeat-



"You can go right in—he's expecting you."

• •

edly assured by Hamas officials, such as Khalil al-Hayya, that they stood for "moderate Islam, the Islam of tolerance and justice and equality," but Gazans who are not in the Party worry. "The whole place is becoming a mosque," a young female reporter, Asma al-Ghoul, complained. She had recently been hassled on the beach by self-appointed morality police, even though she was wearing jeans and a long-sleeved shirt. Jawdat al-Khoudary, a businessman, who is a native Gazan, said that since the Hamas takeover he feels like "a refugee in my own country." An economist, Omar Shaban, said, "The siege has left Hamas with no competition. Secular people are punished. The future is frightening."

One morning, I visited a mosque where about forty teen-age boys were attending a day camp devoted to memorizing the Koran. The Islamic holy book contains more than six thousand verses—it's about the same length as the New Testament—and this summer twenty thousand boys and girls had undertaken the challenge, in camps across the Strip. At the mosque, a small crowd was waiting for the Prime Minister, who was rumored to be coming to talk to the boys. Because Haniyeh is one of the few veteran Hamas leaders in Gaza who have not been assassinated by the Israelis (although they have fired missiles into his office and his home), he's constantly on the move. I was told that his visit to the mosque was my best chance to meet him.

While the boys rocked back and forth on the carpet, reciting in low voices, I was introduced to an elderly refugee and a former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Bald and freckled, with a white mustache, he gave his name as Abu Majid. "On 15 May, 1948, I was twenty-two years old," he said. Israel had formally declared itself an independent nation the day before, triggering the invasion by five Arab armies bent on destroying the Zionists. Egypt moved into the Negev Desert, approaching Beersheba, where Majid lived. "The Egyptian Army asked youngsters like me to help with logistics," he said.

After one battle with the Israelis, Majid and a friend dragged several wounded soldiers inside a bunker. A dozen people were already hiding there. That night, Israeli troops discovered the shelter and ordered everyone out. "There were four old men over seventy, one of whom had a wife who was sixty or sixty-five," Majid said. "When she saw the soldiers, she began to tremble." A younger, dark-skinned woman had two boys and a girl. Upon leaving the shelter, with their hands raised, they were shot. "I don't know why I'm alive," Majid said. "The blood came on me. I was one of three who God saved. We were seven days in the desert of Negev before we reached the villages around Hebron." He had family there. His parents, believing him dead, had erected a mourning tent and were receiving condolences when a friend brought news that their son was alive. His brother slaughtered a sheep in celebration. Majid wept at the memory, the tears streaming into his mustache. According to Benny Morris, the Israeli historian, the fall of Beersheba was marked by many atrocities on the part of the Israeli forces. "A number of civilians were executed after being stripped of valuables," he writes in "1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War."

After two hours of waiting for Haniyeh to arrive at the mosque, some members of the audience gave up. Suddenly, a rumor stirred the room. "He's coming after all," a neighbor assured me. Several television reporters appeared, followed by a small convoy, and then Haniyeh strode in, waving at his supporters. He is forty-seven, squarely built, with a round face, and cautious green eyes that float above a trim white beard. He was dressed in a stark white djellabah and a skullcap, which added to his ministerial air. A former dean of the Islamic University, in Gaza City, Haniyeh grew up in the Al Shati refugee camp, in Gaza. In 1989, after the first intifada, he spent three years in an Israeli prison. Then, in a decision that Israel deeply regrets, Haniyeh and four hundred other activists were expelled to South Lebanon, where they formed an enduring alliance with Hezbollah.

By Hamas standards, Haniyeh is a moderate. He has spoken of negotiating a long-term truce with Israel. That places him at odds with many of the Party's top officials. Khaled Meshal, the over-all leader of Hamas, lives in exile in Damascus, Syria; a hard-liner, he is more likely to initiate radical, destabilizing actions—such as capturing Gilad Shalit. It is often unclear who sets Hamas policies. A council, dominated by representatives of its underground military wing, governs the Party. Because so many Hamas members have been assassinated, the movement operates as an unsteady collective. Even prominent Party members don't always know who is in control. Haniyeh's authority is further undermined by the fact that Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian President, dismissed him as Prime Minister of Gaza, in June, 2007, after the Hamas takeover, and appointed Salam Fayyad, a Fatah loyalist, in his place. Hamas refused to recognize the move, and since then Haniyeh has continued to govern Gaza while Abbas and Fayyad run the West Bank, under Israeli occupation.

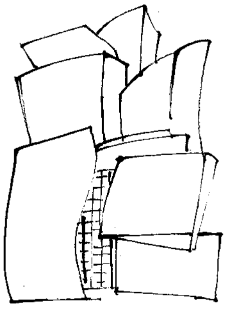
While I was in Gaza, in July, there were talks under way in Cairo to explore the creation of a unity government between Hamas and Fatah, and to make a deal for Gilad Shalit. The Israeli papers were full of expectation about an imminent prisoner swap, but Noam Shalit, Gilad's father, told me that the reports were "ridiculous." He was pessimistic about the prospects for a deal anytime soon. "Hamas ignores every aspect of international conventions," he said. "They would like hard-core killers released. I feel very bad about that." He added that his son's abduction had become "a bottleneck" that had brought all negotiations to a standstill.

At the mosque, Haniyeh addressed the campers on the importance of reciting the Koran. "There are two kinds of people," he advised them. "Those who know the Koran is right and who follow it, and those who turn their backs on the Koran." When he finished speaking, Haniyeh kissed each child who had memorized a third of the Koran, and awarded him fifty Israeli shekels.

Afterward, amid a crush of petitioners, I asked Haniyeh whether the Cairo talks had made any progress. "It's just one step in breaking the siege of Gaza," he said, adding that he hoped the talks would allow reconstruction to begin. I asked if he had had contact with the Obama Administration. Khaled Meshal had responded positively to Obama's June address to the Muslim world, welcoming the "new language toward Hamas" and calling for open dialogue. Haniyeh didn't answer directly. He said that Washington had no veto power over the choice of the Palestinian people but added, "We are ready to deal." He also said that he would step down from his post if he became an obstacle to peace. "The most important thing is the unity of the Palestinian people," he said. "We are willing to do whatever it takes."

I walked outside, among shuttered shops. "The term 'economy' is no longer valid in the Gaza Strip," Omar Shaban, the economist, told me. In 1994, the poverty rate in Gaza was sixteen per cent. (In the U.S., it was 14.5.) But by 1996 the Israelis had virtually shut out Palestinian labor. And the second intifada, four years later, ended tourism in Gaza; before then, Shaban said, more than ten thousand people a month had visited the territory, many of them Israelis who enjoyed the beaches and the seafood. Most economic activity came to a halt in 2007, with the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Now, according to the U.N., about seventy per cent of Gazans live on less than a dollar a day, and seventy-five per cent rely on international food assistance. In 1994, Shaban said, one wage earner supported six people in Gaza; the dependency rate is now one earner for every eighteen people. Unemployment is practically universal, except for people working for international organizations, or trading in the black market. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, ninety-six per cent of Gaza's industrial sector collapsed after Operation Cast Lead.

Ever since the Hamas takeover, Egypt, Gaza's nominal ally, has coöperated with the Israelis in enforcing the blockade. The authorities in Cairo have their own reasons for sequestering Gaza. Hamas is a spinoff of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and the government of Hosni Mubarak worries about contagion. The wall that defines the Gaza Strip along the Israeli border simply turns the corner upon reaching Egypt. Bureaucracy, an Egyptian specialty, forms another kind of barrier. Mohammed Ali Abu Najela, a researcher for Oxfam, was in France when Hamas took over Gaza. "I landed in Cairo, and spent five days in a closed room in the airport with five other Palestinians," he recalls. He and the others were then transported to El-Arish Airport, in the Sinai, where they spent an additional sixty days in the waiting room before they were cleared to go home. Another young man told me that his father had gone to Cairo for emergency medical treatment but was turned away at the hospital, because his travel documents had been signed by the Hamas government in Gaza, not by the Fatah government in the West Bank. The father died shortly afterward.



In January, 2008, Hamas improvised a radical solution to Egypt's restrictions by blowing holes in the security fence surrounding Rafah, the southernmost town in Gaza. Over the next eleven days, hundreds of thousands of Gazans streamed into the Sinai with shopping lists. The Egyptian police formed a cordon that kept Gazans from straying too far into the country. The shops along the border were soon empty. The Gazans went home and the Egyptians sealed up the wall again. (Since then, Egypt has usually opened the border for a couple of days each month.)

Although the West Bank is only twenty-five miles from the Gaza Strip, it feels in many respects even more distant than other parts of the world. The Israelis began requiring special permits for travel between the two halves of Palestine in 1988. Taher al-Nunu is the chief spokesman for Prime Minister Haniyeh. When he was working in the Foreign Ministry, Nunu was allowed to travel around the world, but, like many Gazans, he's never been to the West Bank. "I was in China, Istanbul, and Indonesia, but I didn't go to Nablus, Ramallah, and Qalqilya," he says.

I began to see Gaza as, I suspect, many Gazans do: a floating island, a dystopian Atlantis, drifting farther away from contact with any other society. Omar Shaban told me that, twenty years ago, he could easily drive to Tel Aviv for dinner, and more than a hundred thousand Palestinians travelled into Israel every day for work. "The Palestinian economy was structured to work with the Israeli economy," he said. "Most Palestinians knew Hebrew. There were real friendships." Now, he said, "two-thirds of Gaza youth under thirty have never been outside the Strip. How can they psychologically think of peace? You can fight someone you don't know, but you can't make peace with him."

A nervous-looking young man was pacing on the side of the narrow coastal road outside Gaza City, just past the ruins of the Presidential Palace, which had been destroyed during Operation Cast Lead. My driver stopped for him, and he got into the back seat without a word, indicating that we should continue driving south. It was a Friday afternoon, after prayers, and the beaches were crowded.

Since the Hamas takeover, there have been many warnings that Al Qaeda has infiltrated Gaza. In the summer of 2007, Mahmoud Abbas accused Hamas of "shielding" jihadists. "Through its bloody conduct, Hamas has become very close to Al Qaeda," he said. I had heard about several splinter groups in Gaza that were seen as Al Qaeda affiliates. After extensive negotiations, I was able to arrange a meeting with a representative of one of them. The man in the back seat would guide us there.

We drove past the site of a former Jewish settlement. Across the road were the remains of the greenhouses that the settlers had left behind, intact, with the understanding that Gaza farmers would take them over. The greenhouses were meant to become an important part of the agricultural economy. Gaza's main exports were strawberries, cherry tomatoes, and carnations, destined mainly for Israel and Europe. But then the borders clamped shut and the fruit rotted. The carnations were fed to livestock. Now the greenhouses are nothing more than bare frames, their tattered plastic roofing fluttering in the sea breeze.

NOVEMBER PHILOSOPHERS

Nothing is nothing, although
he would call me that, *She was nothing*.
Those were his words, but his hand was lifting
cigarettes in chains and bridges
of ash-light. He said he didn't want his body to last.
It wasn't a year I could argue
against that kind of talk, so I cut the fowl
killed on the farm a mile out—brown and silvery, wild—
and put it over butter lettuce, lettuce then lime.
I heated brandy in the saucepan, poured a strip of molasses
slowly through the cold, slow as I'd seen
a shaman pour pine tincture over the floor
of my beaten house.
She seemed to see my whole life
by ordinance of some god
who wanted me alive again.
Burnt sage, blue smoke. Then sea salt shaken
into the corners of violent sadness.
She wrote my address
across her chest
to let everything listening know
where my life was made.
We waited, either forgetting what we were
or becoming more brightly human in that pine,
in her trance, in the lavender I set on the chipped sills,
not a trance at all but my deliberate hand cutting
from the yard part of what she required.
Now wait longer, she said, and I did as I would

Our guide pointed to a rise ahead, where a lookout stood guard over another stretch of public beach. We turned in to a sandy drive and parked behind a row of palm-frond cabanas. The lookout ducked into a Port-a-Potty and emerged with an AK-47 and a 9-mm. pistol. Like the guide, he was quiet and unsmiling. He wore jeans and a plaid shirt. He led me to one of the cabanas, where a heavy man in a blue suit was waiting. The man said that I should call him Abu Mohammed. He politely offered tea.

Abu Mohammed claimed to represent four armed groups that have joined a jihadi coalition. (There is such an alliance, called the Popular Resistance Committees.) "When I speak, I speak for all of them," he told me. "We consider Osama bin Laden our spiritual father." His group follows the same ideology as Al Qaeda, but there is no direct connection. "The siege around Gaza has disconnected us from the outside world," he said. "None of us can travel." In Gaza, he estimated, there were about four hundred armed fighters in cells like his, down from as many as fifteen hundred before the Hamas takeover. When Fatah ran the Strip, it was easier for subversives to operate, he said, but now "Hamas is in full control, and their power is very tight." Hamas, he explained, wanted to dictate when violence occurred in Gaza, and tried to keep the Al Qaeda sympathizers penned in.

As we talked, the lookout with the machine gun dragged in a table, and a tea boy arrived, carrying a tray and glasses. It was sweltering inside the hut. Abu Mohammed took off his jacket; his shirt was soaked through. He had a quiet voice and often stared into space as he spoke. He said that he was a former political-science student who had been jailed first by the Israelis, and later by Hamas officials. He gestured to his suit jacket, now in his lap. During his second internment, "Hamas brought in a moderate sheikh with a suit and a tie and the smell of roses to discuss the way we look," he said, in a wry tone. "If I want to dress like my comrades in Afghanistan and Iraq"—wearing the shalwar kameez, the uniform favored by jihadi veterans—"that's prohibited." Finally, his jailers released him with a warning: "Don't do anything against our ceasefire!" He complained, "We feel we're under a microscope. If an Internet café or a beauty salon is burned, immediately they come round up the people they know. If Hamas suspects I am behind all this troublemaking, they will hang me by both hands and both feet for thirty days—that's the minimum."

I asked what his main complaint was against Hamas.

"We thought Hamas was going to apply Islamic law here, but they are not," he said. He spoke of the "fancy restaurants on the beach" and said that Hamas tolerated uncovered women there. "They have a much more moderate way of life, and we cannot deal with that."

When I mentioned Gilad Shalit, Abu Mohammed smiled and said, "I cannot

when the molasses warmed over the pot enough
to come into the brandy,
to come into the night
begun by small confessions—
that this was just a rental, and mine just a floor,
that the woman he loved was with another man,
his mother mad, his apartment haunted in the crawl space.
Then I told of the assault at daybreak between
the houses. Heat, asphalt, all of it and my face toward
the brick school where the apostolate studied first-century script
and song. There must have been chanting,
as it was on the hour.
What we said was liturgy meant only for us
and for that night. Not for anyone else
to repeat, live by, believe. Never that.
Our only theories were inside of our hands,
flesh and land, body and prairie.
I reached to smoke down his next-to-last,
which he lit and made ready.
The poultry like a war ration
we ate all the way through.
What we wished, we said.
What we said, we found that night
by these, and no other,
means.

—*Katie Ford*

talk about this, but a member of our group participated." (Three factions claimed responsibility for the abduction: the armed wing of Hamas, the Popular Resistance Committees, and the Army of Islam.) Mohammed said that the participant's name was Muhammad Farwaneh, and that he had been killed during the operation. Hamas now has exclusive control of Shalit. Mohammed said of the arrangement, "We respect this, because of the higher interest of the exchange of prisoners." Recently, his group had tried to carry off another abduction, but had failed.

I asked him what drew young men into his movement. "First, we have a clear ideology," he said. "Some come because they like our style, and they don't want to live by the rules. Those we don't usually put our money on—when they're tortured, we're finished. Some come from Hamas and feel that they were not treated fairly." Others, like him, think that Hamas is not following true Islam. Abu Mohammed said that most of the recruits are fellow-refugees, but "many are locals from hard-line families—those who believe there is no middle road."

Joint operations with Hamas, such as the Shalit abduction, had ended. "We have no meetings at all with Hamas," Abu Mohammed said. "It's almost as if they want to finish us." He met my eyes at last. "We know how strong they are and how supported they are on the street, but we can't live underground forever."

Six weeks after this conversation, a group of radical Islamists, calling themselves the Soldiers of the Followers of God, stood on the steps of a mosque near the Egyptian border and declared Gaza to be an Islamic emirate. That afternoon, members of the Hamas military wing and the Gaza police surrounded the mosque, demanding that the radicals give themselves up. A shoot-out erupted, continuing into the night. According to the BBC, at least twenty-four people were killed, including the group's leader, Sheikh Abdul Latif Mousa. A hundred people were wounded. I have not been able to determine if Abu Mohammed was a casualty. One of the Hamas fatalities was Abu Jibril Shimali, a commander of its armed wing. Israelis blame him for orchestrating the capture of Gilad Shalit.

Just outside Rafah, the smuggling capital of Gaza, there is a billboard with a portrait of Shalit, behind bars, juxtaposed with a photograph of a masked Hamas fighter. The Arabic text declares, "Your prisoner will not have safety and security until our prisoners have safety and security." In a place where commercial advertising scarcely exists, the billboard is especially jarring.

Shalit's pale features and meek expression haunt the imagination of Gazans. Though it may seem perverse, a powerful sense of identification has arisen between the shy soldier and the people whose government holds him hostage. Gazans see themselves as like Shalit: confined, mistreated, and despairing.

At the same time, the sense of specialness that surrounds Shalit rankles many Gazans. "Everybody talks about Shalit as if he's a holy man," Ahmed Yousuf, the deputy minister, complained. "The whole world is showing such concern about a soldier who is still young and unmarried." Meanwhile, Israel is holding more than seven thousand Palestinians, nearly nine hundred of them from Gaza, who, like Shalit, are cut off from their families and are sometimes held without charge. "People say, 'What's the difference between their Shalit and our Shalits?'" Yousuf remarked. "We are *all* Shalits."

I spoke to Osama Mozini, a professor of education at the Islamic University, who oversees the Shalit negotiations for the government. A barrel-chested man with a stiff beard, he spent five years in an Israeli prison and was arrested three times by the Palestinian Authority because of Hamas activities. I asked him why he could not be more flexible in his negotiations for Shalit. Israel was plainly eager to make a deal that would involve the release of hundreds of Palestinians, many of them convicted of bloody crimes. Mozini bridled at the implication that the Palestinian prisoners were murderers and Shalit was not. "This one who has been abducted is an Israeli soldier who was on the border throwing shells that were killing Palestinians," he said. "We did not take him from the market or from his family. We took him from a military tank on the Gaza border."

The I.D.F. won't say whether Shalit had been involved in military actions against Gaza, but the tanks that line the border do lob shells into the territory, causing many random casualties. While I was there, a teen-age girl was killed, and her young brother injured, in such an incident. The Israelis maintain a buffer zone along the border about half a mile deep, which places at least thirty per cent of the Strip's arable land off limits. In practice, the zone is even wider, according to Mohammed Ali Abu Najela, the Oxfam researcher. "Nearly every week, there are reported cases of farmers being shot at," he told me. He said that Gazans understand the rule to be this: "If I can see you, I will shoot you."

Mozini claimed that Gazans whose relatives were being held in Israel were not pressuring him to make a deal for Shalit. "They are backing us up," he said. "Everybody is asking us to stand firm to get our prisoners back, because this is our only chance." According to a recent U.N. fact-finding mission led by the South African jurist Richard Goldstone, there are approximately eighty-one hundred Palestinian political prisoners held in Israel, including sixty women and three hundred and ninety children. (Most of the children have been charged with throwing stones or belonging to an illegal organization.) The Goldstone report, as it has become known, has been decried by the Israeli government, which considers it reliant on biased testimony. In September, President Obama called the report "flawed." Goldstone, the former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, maintains that the report is fundamentally correct, and has demanded that the Americans specify what the inaccuracies might be.

The treatment of Gazan detainees is harsh; since 2007, they have been barred from any family visits, though they can exchange messages from family members. In March, the Israeli justice department began to consider reducing the privileges of Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners to match the likely "incarceration conditions" of Gilad Shalit.

Mozini began reciting the names of Gazan prisoners who had received sentences of more than a thousand years. Hassan Salameh, a Hamas operative, is serving forty-eight consecutive life sentences for recruiting suicide bombers. Walid Anjes helped plan the bombing at Moment and two other devastating attacks. He has twenty-six life sentences. Mozini mentioned a prisoner named Abdel Hadi Suleiman Ghneim: "He was riding in a bus. All he did was grab the steering wheel and take it over a cliff." He laughed. "Sixteen people were dead and many wounded—even Ghneim was wounded!" Ghneim received a life sentence for every person who died on the bus. These punishments struck Mozini as ludicrous. He assured me that Israel had "no choice" but to comply with Hamas's terms.

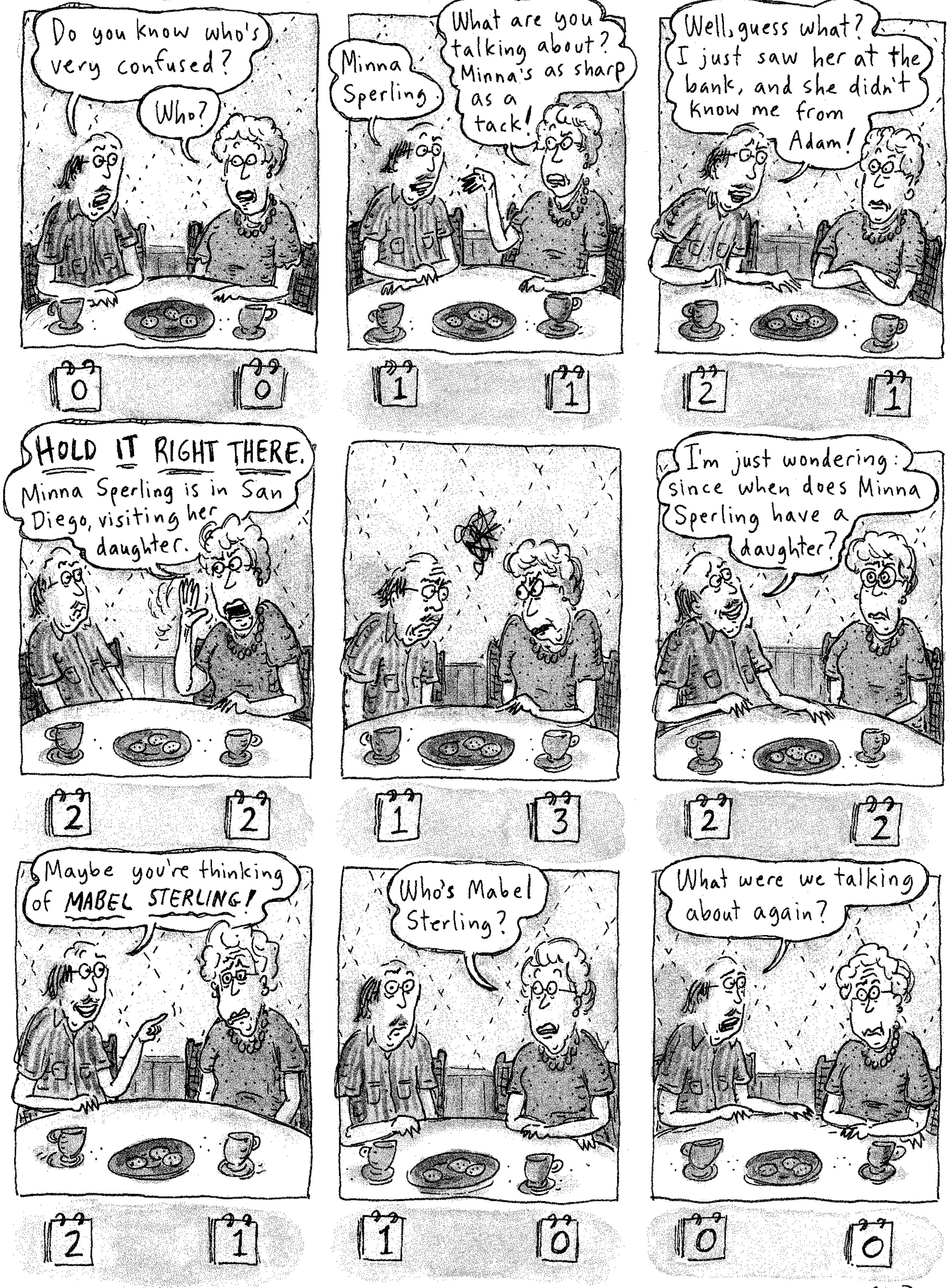
I had gone to Rafah to examine the tunnels that have created a subterranean economy in Gaza. Everything that goes in or out of the Strip, except the three dozen or so commodities that Israel permits to enter the territory, travels through a hole in the ground, including gas, cows, weapons, money, drugs, cars (which are disassembled for the trip), and people. There are hundreds of such tunnels, and they became a primary target for the Israeli Air Force during Operation Cast Lead. When I got there, tunnel diggers were repairing the damage—practically the only reconstruction work I saw in Gaza. A long, ragged row of tents ran about fifty yards from the Egyptian border amid great mounds of sand, and shirtless men worked their claims. Across the border was a village that had once been a part of greater Rafah before the security fence divided the town. The workers aim the tunnels at different buildings across the border, where collaborators have hollowed out a bathroom floor or a spot under a bed. Most of the smuggling is done at night, honoring the conceit that the excavations are secret, even though an Egyptian police station nearby has a clear view of the tunnellers' tents. Occasionally, the Egyptians crack down, blowing up or flooding the passageways. Tunnels also collapse, especially after bombings, which destabilize the soil. But tunnelling is one of the few functioning industries in Gaza, accounting for some thirty-five thousand jobs before Israel's December attacks.

In the tunnel I visited, three men were on the surface and twenty were underground. A motorized pulley extracted buckets of sand. It can take three months to break through to the other side. The tunnel operator, a young man with a big smile and bright calcium deposits on his teeth, introduced himself as Abu Hussein. The other men laughed: it's a pet name in Gaza for Barack Hussein Obama. The operator charges clients a thousand dollars to ship a ton of raw materials through the tunnel, or fifty dollars for a bag of forty kilos. He said that tunnellers frequently bump into each other underground: "It's like Swiss cheese."

It was through such a tunnel that the captors of Gilad Shalit crossed into Israeli territory. Old Soviet-designed GRAD rockets, now manufactured in North Korea and China, and knockoff missiles from Iran also make their way through the underground highways, which is one reason that Israel felt the urgency to act in December. These weapons have a much greater range than homemade rockets. From the northern end of Gaza, the GRADs can reach Ashkelon, seven miles away, a city of more than a hundred thousand people. A member of the Qassam Brigades, the armed faction of Hamas, had told me that they had upgraded their arsenal of rockets last year, getting "shipments from our own tunnels." The rocketeers use Google Earth to locate a target—the power plant in Sderot, for instance. It didn't bother the brigade member that he was aiming at civilians. "They are not limiting *their* war to military targets," he said.

According to the I.D.F., between 2000 and 2008 some twelve thousand rockets and mortars were fired into Israel; sometimes as many as sixty or eighty rockets a day were launched, but because they are so inaccurate the number of Israeli casualties has been relatively modest: fewer than thirty deaths. Still, the anxiety and fury stirred up by the fusillade placed the government of Ehud Olmert under extreme pressure in the run-up to the Israeli elections of February, 2009. In the police station in Sderot, a "Qassam Museum" displays the exploded carcasses of hundreds of rockets that have landed in the area. Barack Obama visited there as

PYRRHIC VICTORY


Do you know who's very confused?
Who?
0
0
Minna Sperling.
What are you talking about? Minna's as sharp as a tack!
1
1
Well, guess what? I just saw her at the bank, and she didn't know me from Adam!
2
1
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE. Minna Sperling is in San Diego, visiting her daughter.
2
2
1
3
I'm just wondering: since when does Minna Sperling have a daughter?
2
2
Maybe you're thinking of MABEL STERLING!
2
1
Who's Mabel Sterling?
1
0
What were we talking about again?
0
0

a candidate, in July, 2008. “No country would accept missiles landing on the heads of its citizens,” he said. “If missiles were falling where my two daughters sleep, I would do everything in order to stop that.” Despite Obama’s assurances, the Israeli government decided to get the war over before the Bush Administration left power.

The stated goal for Operation Cast Lead was to “destroy the terrorist infrastructure,” but there were larger aims. “We cannot allow Gaza to remain under Hamas control,” Tzipi Livni, the Foreign Minister at the time, said. Six months before the operation began, Israel and Hamas had agreed to a truce. The Deputy Defense Minister, Matan Vilnai, warned that Gazans were “bringing upon themselves a greater Shoah, because we will use all our strength in every way we deem appropriate.” Such charged language revealed the degree to which anger permeated the thinking of Israel’s military planners.

On December 19th, the six-month truce between Hamas and Israel formally expired. Israel was willing to extend it, but Hamas refused. Haniyeh complained that Israel had failed to ease the blockade, as the agreement had stipulated. Hamas rockets began flying again. By then, Gaza had run out of allies. Yossi Alpher, the Israeli political analyst, who co-edits the online forum bitterlemons.org, was in Europe when the invasion began. “I was having a good stiff drink with a Saudi colleague,” he recalled. “He told me, ‘This time, do it right.’”

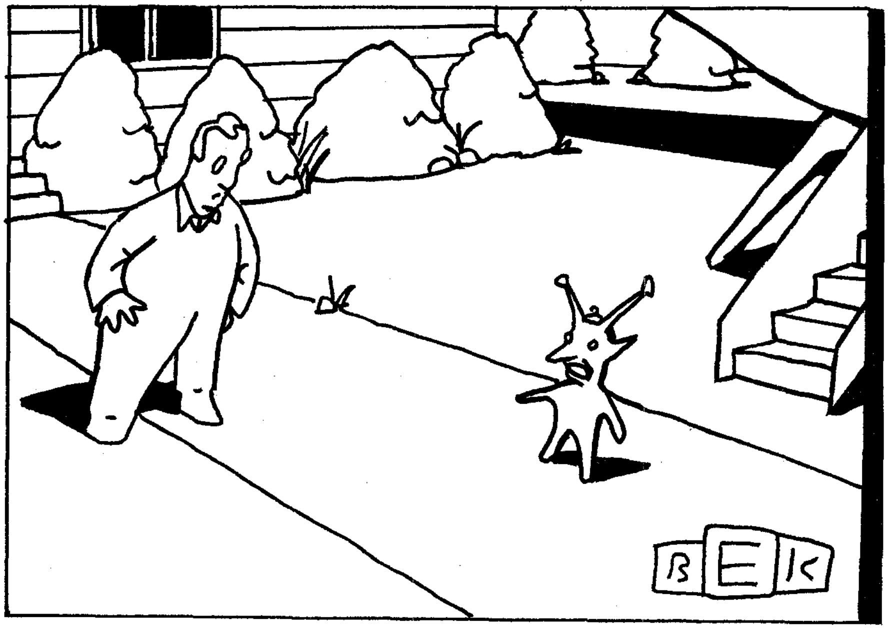
A few weeks before Operation Cast Lead began, Colonel Herzi Halevi, the commander of the 35th paratroop brigade for the I.D.F., was flying over the Strip in a helicopter when he saw three rockets rise out of the Jabalia refugee camp. “I saw the rainbow of smoke, and then fifty to sixty seconds later you see it goes into Sderot,” he told me. “It’s eleven o’clock in the morning. Children are in school. Whether they live or die is a question of whether they are lucky or not. This is something that no other country can accept.”

Halevi, now a brigadier general, is tall and lean, and has a reputation for being an even-tempered, sometimes aloof commander. Like many Israelis, he had come to the conclusion that Gazans deserved what they were going to get. “I had a feeling that on the other side of the fence, in the Gaza Strip, we didn’t find a leadership, or even the sound of people in Gaza, saying something different except fighting, shooting rockets, and kidnapping.” His long career has taught him that, in dealing with terrorism, “if you are not decisive enough, it is not going to be effective.” He had spent much of his career in Sayeret Matkal, an élite hostage-rescue unit. It is likely that rescuing Gilad Shalit was another goal of the operation, although the I.D.F. won’t comment on that. “I told my soldiers that was not our mission,” Halevi said. “Our mission was to take care that we do not become another Gilad Shalit.”

On the morning of December 27, 2008, a training exercise was under way at the police academy in Gaza City. Scores of police officers were in a courtyard. Across the street, children were getting out of school. A pair of Israeli F-16s screamed overhead, part of the first wave of aircraft aimed at police stations, command centers, and Hamas training camps. Explosions engulfed the courtyard. In less than five minutes, dozens of people were killed, and hundreds were wounded.

At the school, many of the students were injured. An Arabic teacher, who asked not to be identified, because he works with international agencies that would not want him to be quoted, carried to Al Shifa hospital one of his students—a fourteen-year-old boy with shards of glass blown into his back and leg. Parents frantically searched for their children as another wave of aircraft raced over the Strip, targeting the militants who were expected to respond by launching retaliatory rockets. Indeed, one Israeli was killed that day by a Hamas rocket; according to the U.N., the death toll in Gaza reached two hundred and eighty, with nine hundred wounded. It was one of the deadliest days of conflict between Israel and its neighbors since 1967.

That night, the teacher and his family stayed in the house. “The bombing started again—it felt like an earthquake, our home was shaking,” he recalls. He was afraid that the windows would shatter, so he removed them. It was freezing weather and the utilities in his home had been shut off. The next day, he went foraging for food and fuel. A mosque near his house had been destroyed. Also nearby was Beit Lehia Elementary School, which the U.N.R.W.A. had turned into an emergency shelter for fifteen hundred people. It was hit by white-phosphorous artillery shells. Such munitions are usually employed to produce smoke screens, but they are also powerful incendiaries. The teacher recalls, “The smoke was very white, and when it comes on the ground it doesn’t explode—it just burns.” The tentacles of fire that enveloped the school reminded him of a giant octopus. Two children burned to death. An I.D.F. investigation found that white phosphorous was used



“Greetings, Earthling. How are the schools?”

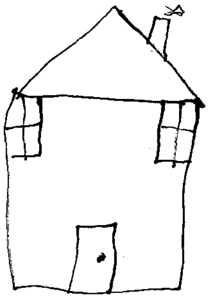
in accordance with international law. A Human Rights Watch report concluded that "the I.D.F. had deliberately or recklessly used white-phosphorous munitions in violation of the laws of war."

From the beginning, there was a dispute about who among the dead and wounded qualified as a "civilian." Some police officers in Gaza had been recruited from the military wing of Hamas, but the Israelis regarded them all as Hamas apparatchiks. In several instances, armed drones killed children who were on rooftops. Were they "spotters," as the Israelis speculated, or children at play, as human-rights workers in Gaza contended? Such questions demonstrate the difficulty that any urban conflict poses in separating actual combatants from innocent civilians. They also underscore the biases that had taken root in each camp: the Israeli belief that Hamas terrorists and the Gazan people were one and the same; the Gazan tendency to support any act of resistance against the Israelis, no matter how self-defeating it might be.

The air operation lasted for more than a week. Gaza's main prison was struck, even though prisoners were still in their cells. Drones crisscrossed the Strip, using high-resolution cameras for precisely targeted missile strikes. Despite the accuracy of such weapons, Israeli and Palestinian human-rights groups reported that eighty-seven civilians were killed by drone strikes, including twelve people who were waiting for a U.N. bus.

On December 30th, the Air Force began demolishing government buildings and cultural institutions. "The Israeli authorities said they were going to destroy the infrastructure of terror," John Ging, the U.N.R.W.A. director, told me. But they also attacked what he called "the infrastructure of peace," such as the American International School in Gaza, the premier educational institution in the Strip. "It was attacked on two occasions by the extremists," Ging said. "They did not succeed in destroying it. It took an F-16 for that." The caretaker of the school was killed in the attack. The Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs, the Presidential Palace, and the parliament were also struck. "These are the buildings of democracy," Ging said. "We in the international community have been building these for a decade, for a future state of Palestine, and they now lie in ruins." Over a six-hour period, several buildings in the U.N.R.W.A. compound housing the agency's food and fuel supplies were shelled repeatedly, despite numerous calls from U.N. officials protesting the onslaught. Three people were injured.

Meanwhile, Hamas rockets continued flying into Israel. One hit a construction site in Ashkelon, killing a Bedouin construction worker and injuring sixteen colleagues. A mother of four died when a rocket exploded near her car in the center of Ashdod. Another rocket landed in Beersheba, twenty-five miles from the Gaza border, injuring six Israeli citizens, including a seven-year-old boy.



The Israeli military adopted painstaking efforts to spare civilian lives in Gaza. Two and a half million leaflets were dropped into areas that were about to come under attack, urging noncombatants to "move to city centers." But Gaza is essentially a cage, and the city centers also came under attack. Intelligence officers called residents whose houses were going to be targeted, urging them to flee. The Air Force dropped "roof knockers"—small, noisemaking shells—on top of some houses to warn the residents to escape before the next, real bomb fell on them.

During the eight days of bombings, the Strip's water and electrical facilities were hit, and many mosques were destroyed. The Israelis assert that mosques served as arms depots for the resistance, and that Hamas placed its own citizens at risk by launching attacks from civilian areas.

All the while, ground troops stood by on the perimeter of Gaza. None of the goals of the operation had been achieved: every day, there were rocket and mortar attacks from the Strip, Hamas remained in control, and Gilad Shalit was still missing. Hamas officials even baited the Israelis, saying, "We are waiting for you to enter Gaza—to kill you or make you into Shalits." That prospect was very much in the minds of some military leaders. The Israeli press reported that soldiers were ordered to kill themselves if they were captured. "No matter what happens, no one will be kidnapped," a company commander told his troops, according to the Tel Aviv newspaper *Yediot Ahronot*. "We will not have Gilad Shalit 2."

A ground invasion began on January 3rd. According to Amnesty International, some Israeli troops were encouraged to fire at "anything that moved." A number of soldiers spoke to a human-rights group called Breaking the Silence about the behavior of Israeli forces during Operation Cast Lead. One said that his orders were "You see a house, a window? Shoot at the window. You don't see a terrorist there? Fire at the window. . . . In urban warfare, anyone is your enemy. No innocents." Another soldier said, "The goal was to carry out an operation with the least possible casualties for the Army, without its even asking itself what the price would be for the other side." A military rabbi told soldiers, "No pity, God protects you, everything you do is sanctified," and "This is a holy war."

The ground troops attacked Gaza simultaneously from the north and the east. The soldiers expected fierce resistance, but the border areas were spookily empty. Some units spent a week in the Strip without seeing a single Arab. Halevi led the paratroopers into the northeastern zone. The first night, he occupied a small town, El Atatra. "This is what I found," he told me later, in his office, on a military base near Tel Aviv. He unfurled a map, drawn by Hamas fighters, showing where snipers were to be stationed, tunnels had been dug, and improvised explosive devices had been planted. Halevi said of Hamas, "They took a civilian neighborhood and turned it into a military camp." He showed me photographs of arms caches that his soldiers had uncovered in mosques, and of houses that had been booby-trapped. "This is the house of one of the Hamas officers in El Atatra," he said, projecting a photograph of a dummy standing beside a dark staircase. "The dummy is to make us think he is a soldier," Halevi said. "Behind him was an I.E.D. There was also a tunnel. The idea was that our soldiers see the dummy, they run to shoot him, and the I.E.D. explodes. Then the terrorists come out of the tunnel and kidnap our soldiers."

Human Rights Watch has reported

eleven instances of Israeli troops shooting civilians carrying white flags, including five women and four children—one of many incidents that human-rights groups say may constitute a war crime. According to Halevi, Hamas fighters had stationed weapons in various houses so that they could fire on the Israelis. When the troops approached, the fighters came outside unarmed, carrying a white flag. Maintaining this guise, they ran over to another arms cache and resumed firing.

The Israeli government has refused to coöperate with investigations by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, citing "their biased dispositions." It has also declined to participate in the U.N. inquiry led by Richard Goldstone. The U.N. delegation heard ample testimony about the use of civilians, including children, as human shields. The I.D.F., which is conducting its own investigations into possible misconduct, says that it has the right "to defend its civilians from intentional rocket attacks" and that it "discharged that responsibility in a manner consistent with the rules of international law."

The Goldstone report cites evidence that Hamas also committed war crimes, by targeting the civilian population of Israel with rockets. Halevi said that Hamas also used human shields: "If you launch a rocket and two seconds later hold a child in your hands in order to protect yourself from our helicopters, *you* are committing a war crime." Amnesty International has reported that it found "no evidence that Hamas or other Palestinian fighters directed the movement of civilians to shield military objectives from attacks."

Halevi told me,"The easiest thing would have been to attack from the air with cannons—just erase the town. We didn't even think about that." He believes that his unit took extra risks in order to avoid civilian casualties. One of his officers was killed. "To speak about us like the tribes in Darfur or Bosnia that really exercise war crimes, this is something I can't understand," he said.

Most of Israel's immediate military objectives were achieved within hours of the ground invasion. What followed was the systematic destruction of Gaza's infrastructure. Al Quds hospital, where many of the wounded were being treated, was shelled, under the apparently mistaken belief that a Hamas headquarters was in the building. Meanwhile, tanks fired on houses, mosques, and schools. The Israeli Navy strafed buildings along the coast and the intelligence headquarters in Gaza City, which is rumored to have been built by the C.I.A. when Fatah was still in control. Armored bulldozers took down houses and factories. Israel's Deputy Prime Minister, Eli Yishai, later said, "Even if the rockets fall in open air, or to the sea, we should hit their infrastructure and destroy one hundred homes for every rocket fired." Houses that weren't destroyed were sometimes vandalized. Halevi himself had to send several soldiers back to Israel for ethical violations. "We told them, 'We don't want you, you have a level of morality we don't accept.'" But most of the damage was officially tolerated, if not encouraged. According to various international agencies, fourteen per cent of the buildings in Gaza were partially or completely destroyed, including twenty-one thousand homes, seven hundred factories and businesses, sixteen hospitals, thirty-eight primary health-care centers, and two hundred and eighty schools. Two hundred and fifty wells were destroyed, three hundred thousand trees were uprooted, and large swaths of agricultural land were made no longer arable, in part because of contamination and unexploded ordnance.

Thirteen Israelis died, including nine soldiers—four of them from friendly fire—and four civilians, who were killed by rockets. (Israeli civilian casualties were kept to a minimum because many residents near the border fled the area, and those who remained hid inside fortified bunkers.) Hamas claims that only forty-eight fighters were lost during the entire operation. The toll on Gaza civilians was far higher. According to Amnesty International, fourteen hundred Gazans died, including three hundred children; five thousand were wounded. Israel claims that only eleven hundred and sixty-six Palestinians died, two hundred and ninety-five of them civilians. The Israeli human-rights organization B'tselem has documented seven hundred and seventy-three cases in which Israeli forces killed civilians not involved in hostilities. So far, the group says, Israel has convicted only one soldier of a crime during the operation—for stealing a credit card.

Because the Israeli military forbade international observers and journalists to enter Gaza during the operation, the scale of the destruction was largely hidden from view. One voice in Gaza that became familiar to Israeli television viewers was that of Ezzeldeen Abu al-Aish, a Palestinian gynecologist and peace activist who had trained and practiced in Israel. He often spoke to Israel's Channel 10, giving reports, in Hebrew, about the medical crisis in the Gaza hospitals. On January 16th, the day before the war ended, a tank shell went through a bedroom window of his fourth-floor apartment in Jabalia, killing two of his teen-age daughters and a niece, and seriously injuring another daughter and several relatives. His oldest daughter ran into the room to see what had happened, only to be struck dead by a second tank shell.

Moments later, he rang the Channel 10 newsman Shlomi Eldar on his cell phone, in the middle of a broadcast. Eldar answered on air, and the anguished wails of Abu al-Aish on the other end of the line jolted many Israelis. "No one can get to us," the doctor cried, begging for help to get his injured family to a hospital. "My God. . . . Shlomi, can't anyone help us?" Eldar persuaded the Israeli Army to let ambulances through to rescue the survivors.

The I.D.F. initially claimed that Palestinian rockets had struck the building, and then, after that was disproved, that the tank was responding to "suspicious" figures on the third floor. Later still, the I.D.F. concluded that an Israeli tank had fired the two shells that killed the girls.

"We have proven to Hamas that we have changed the equation," Tzipi Livni said on January 12th, five days before Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire and started to pull out of the Strip. "Israel is not a country upon which you fire missiles and it does not respond. It is a country that when you fire on its citizens it responds by going wild."

The morning that the Israelis began their withdrawal, Hamas launched five more missiles at Sderot, then declared its own ceasefire. Khaled Meshal, who was in Damascus, far from the action, claimed victory for Hamas.

Five months after Operation Cast Lead, Hamas sponsored a workshop in Gaza City on "How to Talk to Israel." Two dozen people attended, most of them academics or journalists. "What Is-

DEER
X DRESSING
Shanahan

rael knows about Hamas is that Hamas wants to eliminate them," one of the panelists observed. Governing imposes new responsibilities, he said, but since coming to power "Hamas has not changed its speech." A member of the audience said that Hamas had not even decided what to call Israel, pointing out that some speakers had used the term "Israeli entity" and others had called it the "Zionist entity." "You can't say to our own public you are going to throw Israel into the sea and then talk another way to the outside world—you have to have one speech," the audience member said. "We address moderates in Israel with words, and then we also sent rockets to them. . . . We should be responsible but also clear in what we want. The world is not going to wait for us forever."

Many Gazans I spoke to were introspective about Israel's crushing retaliation. A Palestinian aid worker saw the invasion in geopolitical terms. "The war has a double meaning for the whole world, but especially for Iran," he said. "This is how it will be for anyone who would think to play with Israel." Eman Mohammed, a young photographer, told me that she was shocked by the indifference of the Arab world. "Look at the U.S. and Britain, sending convoys of aid," she said. "Maybe we needed this war to look at things in a different way." The sight of buildings being destroyed in Gaza made her more sympathetic to the reaction of America to 9/11. "I thought Osama bin Laden was a hero, but he's not. He's just a corrupted man taking us all to hell."

The teacher in Gaza told me that many children have been reluctant to return to class, because that's where they were when the bombs began to fall. (The Ministry of Education and Higher Education has reported that a hundred and sixty-four pupils and twelve teachers were killed during the operation.) Some of the children have become extremely aggressive, forming gangs. "They don't listen, they don't care what you're saying," the teacher told me. Others are mute, but "as soon as they hear a loud sound they start screaming."

The boy he took to the hospital has become one of the disruptive ones. Before the war, the boy was good at his lessons. "Now he has a dark future," the teacher said. "If he doesn't continue his learning, he is not going to be able to go to the university. He will lose his opportunity to be an effective member of the community. Soon, you will see him on the street."

Ahmed Yousuf warned me, "If there's not a solution in the near future, things will go out of control. At every level, you find people suffering from a siege mentality. They don't know which direction to take. There's no guidance from the world community or from our local leaders. We have lost the wise men among the Palestinians."

Hamas is more firmly entrenched in Gaza than it was before the invasion. It controls the only newspaper and the local television station, and it bans any Palestinian paper that does not reflect the views of the Party. Moreover, according to Israeli intelligence, Hamas is already rearming with high-quality weapons, many of them supplied or paid for by Iran. "They are now smuggling in rockets and rebuilding," General Halevi said. "I tell you, we will come again, in better shape, because we have learned our lessons."

The blockade of Gaza has not been lifted, or even reduced. Soon after the troops returned to Israel, Haim Ramon, then the Vice-Premier, declared that "Israel is facing a serious humanitarian crisis, and it is called Gilad Shalit." He added, "Until he is returned home, not only will we not allow more cargo to reach the residents of Gaza, we will even diminish it." In July, the incoming Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, echoed this position.

On October 2nd, Hamas released a proof-of-life video of Gilad Shalit, in exchange for the release of twenty female Palestinian prisoners. Shalit appears gaunt but healthy. Three months earlier, Shalit's father, Noam, had travelled to Geneva to testify before Goldstone's fact-finding panel. He made the case that his son's abduction, and the refusal of his captors to allow the International Red Cross to determine if he is alive and well, were war crimes. He used the forum as an opportunity to address the people of Gaza. "Your leaders are fighting to return your sons and daughters from captivity," he said. "This is an understandable desire." But, he added, "the fate of an entire prison population cannot depend on the ransom of one young man. . . . You know that the injustice done to my son was the trigger for war. You also know that the release of my son is the key to peace.

"I know that you are short of food," he went on. "Some of your loved ones have been killed—women and children, young and innocent. . . . As a parent speaking to a multitude of parents, I ask you to understand my family's anguish." ♦

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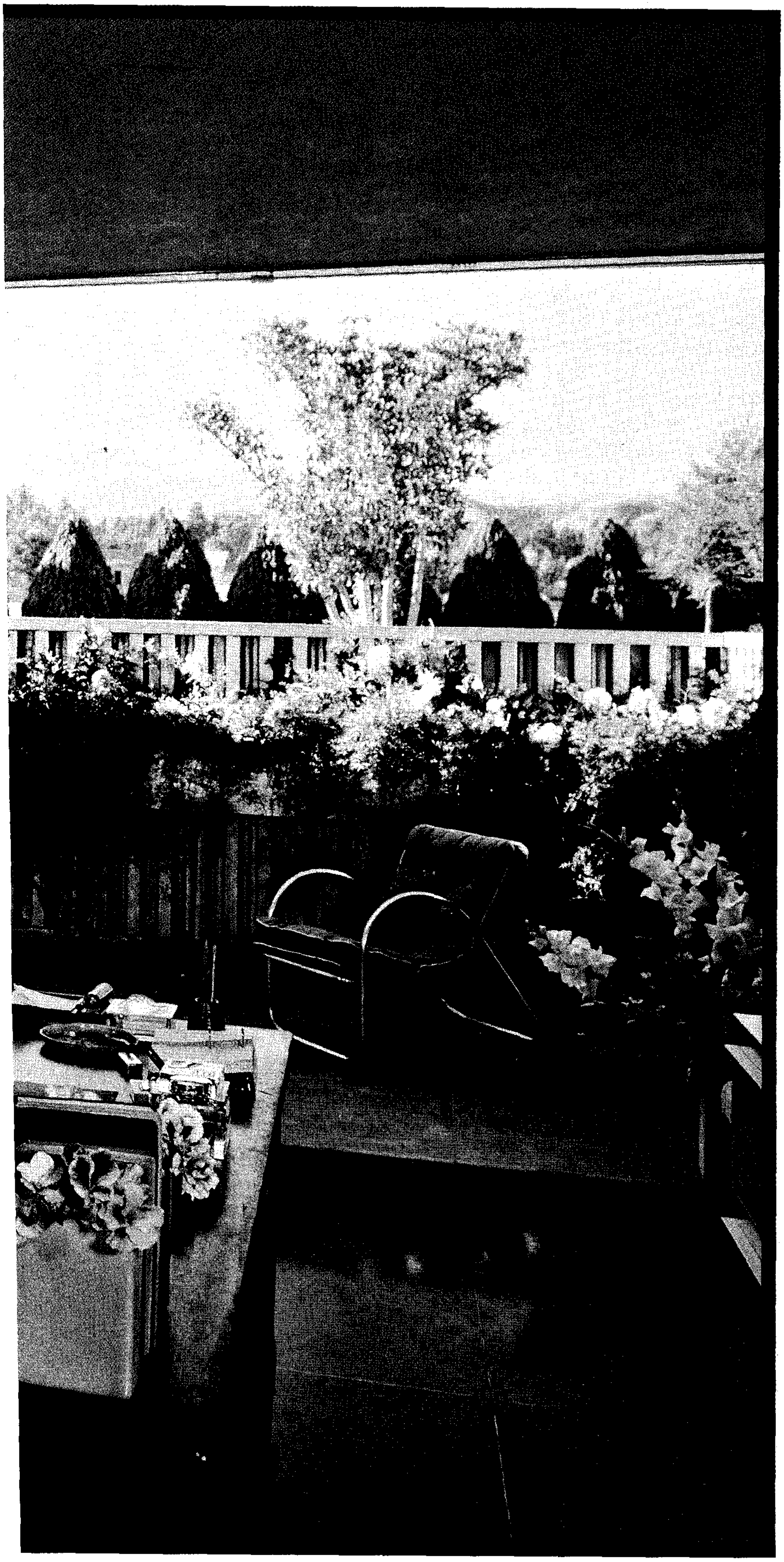
Hear a conversation with Lawrence Wright.

lley, in 1947. She had already published "The Fountainhead,"



ed to become a right-wing Steinbeck. Photograph by Julius Shulman.

Of all Americans who have appeared on the nation's postage stamps, Ayn Rand is probably the only one to have thought that the United States government has no business delivering mail. In her central pronouncement of political belief—the character John Galt's radio address, which begins on page 1,000 of Rand's 1957 novel, "Atlas Shrugged"—allowance is made for the state to run an army, a police force, and courts, but that's it.

Most readers make their first and last trip to Galt's Gulch—the hidden-valley paradise of born-again capitalists featured in "Atlas Shrugged," its solid-gold dollar sign standing like a Maypole—sometime between leaving Middle-earth and packing for college. Only a handful become lifetime followers of Objectivism, Rand's codified philosophy, which holds that reality exists as something concrete and external, not created by God or by a person's consciousness; that emotions derive from ideas; and that self-interest rather than altruism is man's ethical ideal.

But a sizable number of readers seem tempted to return to Galt's Gulch during leftward lurchings of the body politic. Sales of "Atlas Shrugged," never less than robust, have these days been spiking, as commentators like Glenn Beck tout the book as an antidote to the supposed socialism of President Obama's domestic program. Readers looking for rhetoric against government-sponsored health care will find a lungful of it in "Atlas Shrugged," about two hundred and fifty pages (a hop, skip, and a jump by the standards of Randian narrative) before Galt's broadcast.

Rand died twenty-seven years ago, at the age of seventy-seven. This month, the first two full-length biographies of her that were not written by disciples or apostates of her movement (some would say cult) are making their appearance. These objective looks at the first Objectivist, Anne C. Heller's "Ayn Rand and the World She Made" (Doubleday; $35) and Jennifer Burns's "Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right" (Oxford; $27.95), have different strengths and a shared weakness. Heller, a journalist and magazine editor, does the better job of dealing with Rand's early life in Russia and her later personal dramas. Burns, a professor of history, more ably situates Rand within and against the world of American conservatism. Both biographers overestimate, Heller more seriously, the literary achievement of their subject, whose intellectual genre fiction puts her in the crackpot pantheon of L. Frank Baum and L. Ron Hubbard; it is no closer to the canon of serious American novels than Galt's Gulch is to Brook Farm.

Born in Russia in 1905, as Alisa Rosenbaum, Rand was the daughter of two St. Petersburg Jews, a prosperous pharmacist and his socially ambitious wife. For a time, her best school friend seems to have been Olga Nabokov, a sister of Vladimir, though Rand did not generally play well with others. Marked by what Heller calls "extreme shyness and violent intensity," Rand from her earliest days cultivated fantasies of overachievement that would separate her first from Russia's Chekhovian lassitude and then from the levelling violence of its revolution. She never ceased admiring her father's refusal to coöperate with the new Soviet regime, which by the early nineteen-twenties had reduced the Rosenbaums to a communal apartment with a smoky cookstove.

Rand's days at the Communist-controlled Petrograd State University are depicted in her first—and least preposterous—novel, "We the Living" (1936), in which the heroine, Kira, tries to coax her doomed lover, Leo, toward a thunderous vow of resistance: "We'll fight it, Leo. Together. We'll fight all of it. The country. The century. The millions. We can stand it. We can do it." As Heller points out, "We the Living" contains the only tragic ending in Rand's fiction. A Soviet border guard shoots Kira as she tries to escape into Latvia.

Rand herself left the U.S.S.R. for America with a stamped passport and the sponsorship of some relatives of her mother's who lived in Chicago. Her vision of the U.S. had already been shaped by obsessive moviegoing, and she was determined to make the Midwest no more than a stop on the way to success in Hollywood as a screenwriter. Even before leaving the Soviet Union, she had published a pamphlet on the silent-film actress Pola Negri, and like a movie star herself she now refashioned "Rosenbaum" into her own new name. Heller and Burns both knock down the myth that a Remington-Rand typewriter inspired the rechristening.

There is a greater factual basis to the legend of Rand's having met Cecil B. DeMille before she worked as an extra on his production of "The King of Kings" (1927). On the set, Rand persuaded a costume director to promote her from a crowd of beggars to a crowd of patricians, and DeMille had his story chief look at her film scenarios, which were soon judged over the top. Rand achieved steadier success working in the R.K.O. wardrobe department, and then had a writerly breakthrough with a courtroom murder drama called "Night of January 16th." Thanks to a gimmick that allowed each night's audience to serve as the jury and thereby choose the ending, the play made it to Broadway, where Rand railed against the producers' subordination of its incidental messages about the beauty of unbridled individualism.

Settling in New York with her husband, Frank O'Connor (another "King of Kings" extra), Rand set seriously to work on the first of her two major novels, "The Fountainhead." Writing the book took four and a half years, including the time Rand worked in the architectural offices of Ely Jacques Kahn, gathering material with which she could texture the professional world of Howard Roark. A visionary modernist forced to operate in a world of tired derivation, Roark is a man who will blow up a housing project when its construction compromises his elegant blueprints for it. Roark's career has certain parallels to Frank Lloyd Wright's (the novel's Stoddard Temple is a version of the Unity Temple Wright built in Oak Park, Illinois), and Dominique Francon, Roark's worshipper, nemesis, and confederate—a lioness amid poodles—is, by the author's admission, Rand herself "in a bad mood."

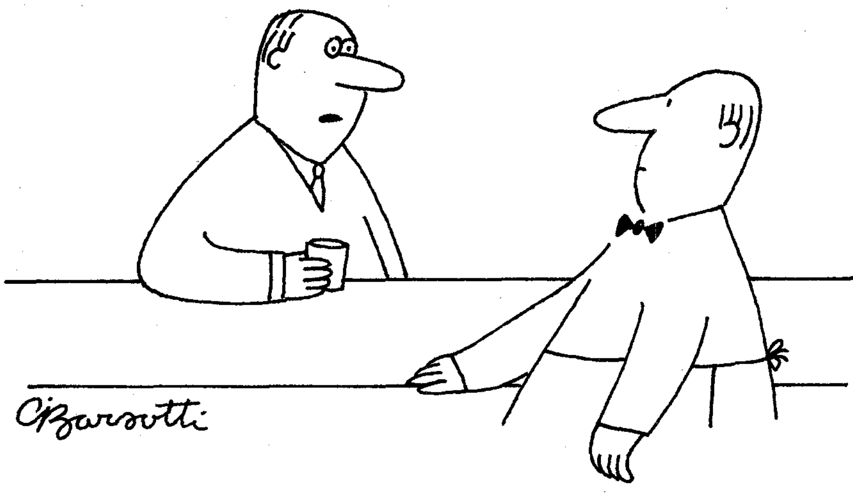
After blowing the deadline that Alfred A. Knopf gave her, Rand started taking Benzedrine to meet the one imposed by her new publisher. Bobbs-Merrill wound up bringing out "The Fountainhead" in 1943, to mostly bad reviews but eventually prodigious word-of-mouth sales. Rand saw the chance to become a right-wing Steinbeck, and hoped that the book's championship of individualism might even help Thomas E. Dewey put an end to the New Deal in the 1944 election.

Heller finds the novel "phenomenally compelling," possessed of a "thrilling intensity"; Burns, more warily, calls "The Fountainhead" a "strange book, long, moody, feverish" but ultimately "unforgettable." It is, in fact, badly executed on every level of language, plot, and characterization. Dominique is not simply, as Burns would concede, "highly stylized"; she is a kind of couture-clad Tesla coil. A reader doesn't know whether to light her cigarette or to light his with her:

> She stood leaning against a column, a cocktail glass in her hand. She wore a suit of black velvet; the heavy cloth, which transmitted no light rays, held her anchored to reality by stopping the light that flowed too freely through the flesh of her hands, her neck, her face. A white spark of fire flashed like a cold metallic cross in the glass she held, as if it were a lens gathering the diffused radiance of her skin.

Roark, too, is a kind of external combustion engine: when he uses a blowtorch, "it seemed as if the blue tension eating slowly through metal came not from the flame but from the hand holding it."

Rand never once seems struck by the contrast between the taciturnity she so admires in her hero and the authorial ver-



"I want to vote my fears this year, but they'll only let me vote once."

bosity that stretches the novel to 727 pages. (The book would have been a third longer had wartime paper scarcity not made Rand cut the manuscript.) The thematic repetitions are such that this novel about architecture becomes a kind of Levittown, with chapter after chapter hammered together to establish exactly the same point that was made in the one before. The notorious scene in which Dominique throws herself against Roark with a lot of biting and blood (Rand called it "rape by engraved invitation") is less arousing than confusing; the only thing detracting from Dominique's pleasure is her disappointment that Roark doesn't have, along with his marble muscles, a criminal record. The novel's dialogue is never even accidentally plausible: Gail Wynand, a Hearst-like newspaper magnate, rises from the gutters of Hell's Kitchen to speak such lines as "One doesn't love God and sacrilege impartially. Except when one doesn't know that sacrilege has been committed."

"The Fountainhead" hymns skyscrapers as monuments to human ingenuity and free will, but the rhetoric it applies to the humans inside them can be as naturalistic as anything out of Dreiser or Norris: "Elevators drew a stream of human fuel and spat it out." Roark's tormentors, the craven collectivists and "second-handers" living off others' visions and work, can be preposterously named or physically defective, but the free will cherished by his own camp seems less a clean jet from a fountain than some murky water cycle of self-pity and pointless gesture. Dominique at one point tells Roark why she has decided to marry his slack, despicable opposite: "What else could I offer you? The things people sacrifice are so little. I'll give you my marriage to Peter Keating. I'll refuse to permit myself happiness in their world. I'll take suffering. That will be my answer to them, and my gift to you."

After the war, Rand and O'Connor returned to Southern California, where she did some screenwriting for Hal Wallis, volunteered herself as a friendly witness to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and unhappily watched over the filming of "The Fountainhead," which starred Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal as Roark and Dominique. Rand was furious when Roark's most important line in the novel's big trial scene—"I wish to come here and say that I am a man who does not exist for others"—was cut from the film.

Settled companionably enough in a glassy, sharp-edged Richard Neutra house, Rand and O'Connor called each other Fluff and Cubbyhole. He poured his efforts into gardening and the maintenance of his wife's working comfort. Often sloppy at home, Rand cultivated a striking, geometric look for the cameras and for her growing public. She wore gowns by Adrian, the costume designer who, when still Adrian Greenberg, had promoted her from pleb to aristocrat in "The King of Kings." The diagonal slash of her hairdo was soon complemented by a cape, and the jabbings of her cigarette holder punctuated her dogmatic, accented conversation.

Nathan Blumenthal, a nineteen-year-old college student, entered the O'Connors' household, after sending some fan letters, in March, 1950. The young man had more or less memorized "The Fountainhead," and his devotion to Rand's vision earned him an invitation to visit. Blumenthal, who later became Nathaniel Branden, started introducing Rand to other young disciples, including his future wife, Barbara Weidman. Rand regarded them all as "children of *The Fountainhead*," though Nathan and Barbara were the central devotees; when they moved to New York for graduate study, Rand and her husband followed. For part of the trip O'Connor was literally chained to the manuscript of "Atlas Shrugged," Rand's enormous novel-in-progress, which travelled in a case that came with a handcuff. He eventually had to share the novel's dedication with Branden.

When the relationship between author and acolyte turned physical, in late 1954, the four parties involved—Ayn, Frank, Nathaniel, and Barbara—sat down for a rational discussion of what Ayn had decided would be a relatively brief affair. In the event, it lasted fourteen years. "Seen from a certain perspective," Heller writes, the attractive, reverent Branden "made an ideal mistress, even as Frank had become an ideal wife."

The young libertarians beginning to gather at Rand's feet in her Murray Hill apartment called themselves, with less irony than they believed, the Collective. Among them was Alan Greenspan, whom Rand nicknamed the Undertaker. By most accounts, the future Federal Reserve chairman behaved with less slavish subordination than the other self-professed individualists, who regarded Rand, according to Burns, "as a genius without compare." The philosopher's most famous directive was "Check your premises," but those in her orbit never dared question hers. They adopted Rand's tastes in everything from furniture to music (Rachmaninoff, good; Brahms, bad), and tightened themselves into a circle that came to be governed by loyalty tests and living-room show trials. Nathaniel Branden became the group's disciplinarian.

In the mid-fifties, the Collective spent Saturday nights reading the six hundred and forty-five thousand words of "Atlas Shrugged" slowly rolling out of Rand's typewriter. (She finished the book in another Benzedrine burst.) No one in this preview audience ever thought to suggest that a slim, schematic parable—an entertaining, pro-capitalist lesson on the scale of, say, "Animal Farm"—might be getting smothered by the torrents of narrative and speechifying that the author was unleashing from Monday to Friday.

Dagny Taggart, the book's heroine, is the beautiful, capable heir to a great railroad fortune. She struggles to save Taggart Transcontinental from the mismanagement of her self-loathing brother and from the army of profit-hating government regulators who are turning the United States into an ever less productive place. Dagny is in love with the industrialist Hank Rearden, whom the bureaucrats won't allow to produce sufficient quantities of a new miracle alloy that could speed the nation back to growth and prosperity. Dagny is also trying to find a man who, worn down by others' phony altruism and incompetence, has abandoned his invention of a motor that had even more wondrous potential than Rearden Metal. Meanwhile, her former love, a wealthy copper magnate named Francisco d'Anconia, pretends to be a feckless playboy while actually helping create John Galt's laissez-faire redoubt in the mountains of Colorado. Along with a forest of straw men even less appetizing than the second-handers of "The Fountainhead," Rand introduces readers to a dashing pirate named Ragnar Danneskjöld, who plunders the government's ill-gotten tax-takings whenever they're available on the high seas.

The novel drops enormous set pieces

of free-market oratory upon the "moochers" and "looters" and "college-infected parasites" whose world will soon, thanks to Galt's secret recruitings, be robbed of all the brainy enterprise it needs in order to run. Rand was always against the first use of force (her pirate somehow gets a pass on this issue), but throughout "Atlas Shrugged" the narrative voice of this implacably anti-Communist author is a bellows of Stalinist bad breath. In explaining why the passengers on a Taggart train are all unconsciously complicit in the bureaucratic buck-passing that will soon cause an accident that takes their lives, Rand notes, "The man in Roomette 3, Car No. 11, was a sniveling little neurotic who wrote cheap little plays into which, as a social message, he inserted cowardly little obscenities to the effect that all businessmen were scoundrels." The only words missing are "stooge" and "lackey."

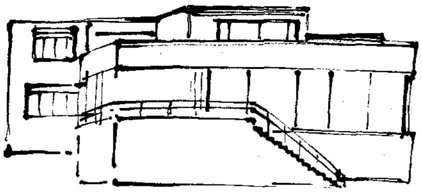
Whether Dagny will opt out of the dying real world and settle herself in humming Galt's Gulch is one of the novel's many foregone conclusions masquerading as matters of suspense. She is certainly ready for a change, knowing as she does "that an emotion was a sum totaled by an adding machine of the mind," and that nothing leaves an afterglow like rape—so long as one keeps the act attached to those frequently checked philosophical premises. As Francisco d'Anconia, the most cerebral pseudo-Latin lover in literary history, explains to Hank Rearden, "Just as physical action unguided by an idea is a fool's self-fraud, so is sex when cut off from one's code of values."

"Atlas Shrugged" does have its compelling moments: Dagny's windblown first run through the Rockies on the new John Galt Line she has had built with beautiful aquamarine-colored Rearden Metal; the primitive squalor into which the town of Starnesville sinks once a do-gooder scheme drives its factory to ruin; the pompous, delusional directives from government entities like the "office of the Morale Conditioner." But in Rand's fiction all moments must stretch into hours, and the book's real element, starting with the inert past tense of its title, is not shiny Rearden Metal but lead. This is how people crack a smile in "Atlas Shrugged": "She saw the look of that luminous gaiety which transcends the solemn by proclaiming the great innocence of a man who has earned the right to be light-hearted." The problem is temperamental, not linguistic; the books would have been no more concise and no less clumsy had she written them in Russian.

Rand may be, in an aesthetic sense, the most totalitarian novelist ever to have sat down at a desk. She would have mocked the "intentional fallacy," the term critics of her era used to describe the mistaken notion that a work of art can be understood through its creator's expressed goals. If anything, she believed in an intentional imperative. Richard Halley, the resident composer of Galt's Gulch, thanks Dagny for admiring his work "for the things I wished to be admired." When it came to readers, Rand wanted only the second-handers she otherwise pronounced so despicable.

Whittaker Chambers, whose own anti-Communism did not make him an admirer of Rand, excoriated the book, declaring, "From almost any page of 'Atlas Shrugged,' a voice can be heard, from painful necessity, commanding: 'To a gas chamber—go!'" Actually, Rand and her heroes were only Pied Pipering readers to get a flashlight and take the book under a cozy blanket. "Atlas Shrugged" never offered any serious alternative to the social order; whatever Rand's intention, the novel was not a call to arms but an invitation to escape. The book could never, in fact, have been any shorter, because it needed to feel like a whole substitute world, a full-blown reassuring place—*you're right, they're wrong; you're special, they're not*—into which the discoverer can jump, as into a magic wardrobe, and then live, happily, airlessly, for weeks of reading and rereading.

Burns recognizes Rand's fiction to be "part of the underground curriculum of American adolescence," but, like Heller, she is too willing to see the author's dictates about "romantic realism" as a sincerely offered aesthetic, rather than as a post-facto justification for Rand's artistic incapacities. The novelist who invented Howard Roark and John Galt needed to insist that literary characters be "abstract projections," lest her own paper-airplane creations fall to the library floor. "The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature," written by Rand in the years after "Atlas Shrugged" and trounced by critics, shows her to be not only a poor reader but also poorly read. In this book and in a later one, "The Art of Fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers," Rand generally relies on the same little shelf of Western literature (Hugo, Dumas) that she managed to read when very young, between movies. Her opinions about anything beyond it are strident and bizarre: "Anna Karenina," in which Tolstoy "attacked man's desire for happiness and advocated its sacrifice to *conformity*," is "the most evil book in serious literature." Shakespeare, with his belief in a character's "innate 'tragic flaw,'" is the "spiritual father" of naturalism, whose deterministic view of man will start doing real damage in the nineteenth century. For a work of literature that truly believes in "man's integrity," Rand would recommend "the greatest play in the history of Romantic literature"—"Cyrano de Bergerac." The O. Henry she describes bears more resemblance to the candy bar than to the story writer: his "unique characteristic is the pyrotechnical virtuosity of an inexhaustible imagination projecting the gaiety of a benevolent, almost childlike sense of life." Rand liked to shock highbrows by sticking up for Mickey Spillane, supposedly for his unfashionable belief in clear-cut good versus clear-cut evil. She hoped, for a while, to see Farrah Fawcett play Dagny Taggart in a television mini-series of "Atlas Shrugged," since she had discerned the ways in which "Charlie's Angels" favored romantic aspiration over naturalistic squalor. During the late nineteen-seventies, Rand never missed the program on Wednesday nights.



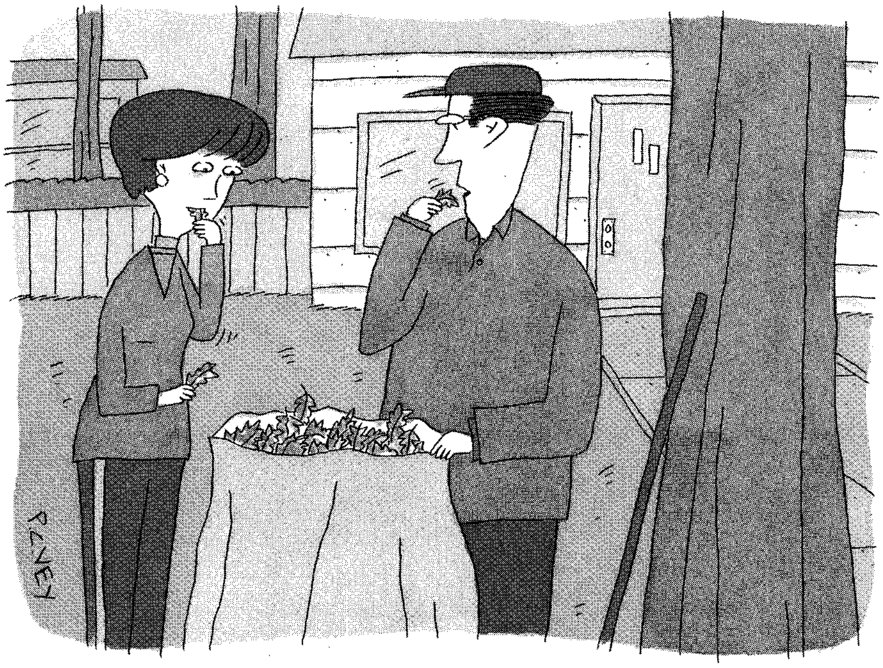
According to Heller, Rand was "shriveled" (Burns says "shattered") by the reviews of "Atlas Shrugged." But the book sold well, and marked the beginning of Rand's real, crankish fame. Arrestingly abrasive, she commanded in the nineteen-sixties roughly the same sort of national attention that Americans accorded another atheist, Madalyn Murray O'Hair. Mike Wallace, *Playboy*, and Johnny Carson all interviewed her, and she was a big draw even on countercultural campuses. Writing another novel seemed beyond her, and she took to composing philosophy straight up, without the cardboard fictional struts. She remained pro-Aristotle, anti-Plato, and anti-Kant—a godless evangelist for a fair-dealing society of "traders" as imagined by John Galt, whom Rand, according to Heller, "formed the habit of quoting . . . as an independent authority who proved her points."

Nathaniel Branden spread her message in lectures and on tapes, developing what Burns calls a "sprawling empire" before his long affair with Rand reached its catastrophic end. The mentor discontinued sexual relations with the pupil during her long depression over the "Atlas Shrugged" reviews—Branden noted how, like her readers, she began escaping into the book's "alternate reality"—and by the time she was ready to resume them Branden had fallen in love with a younger woman. He stalled, lied, and eventually came clean, provoking in August of 1968 a ferocious bitch-slapping from the woman he once called Mrs. Logic. Rand administered the denunciation and physical blows in the presence of both Branden's ex-wife and her own husband. From this point on, instead of being her "intellectual heir," as Rand had once designated him, Branden became, Heller says, the living embodiment of all her second-handing literary villains. Modern editions of "Atlas Shrugged" have dropped him from its dedication, leaving that page to the long-suffering Frank O'Connor.

Rand's life was filled with lesser breaks and banishments. Patrons (the journalist Isabel Paterson), allies (the economist Ludwig von Mises), publishers (Random House's Bennett Cerf), disciples (the philosopher John Hospers), and even a long-lost sister who showed up from Russia—all got the heave-ho. Her friendships could reach fulfillment only when she ended them; the dismissals and excommunications, the refusal to engage any further, seem to have acted as a thrilling validation of her own rightness. Heller quotes one friend who says that Rand "could be immensely empathetic if she saw things in you that were like her. But if she didn't see herself in some aspect of you, she didn't empathize at all. You weren't real to her."

The postwar conservative movement never knew what to do with her. Businessmen gratefully took up her books, but her atheism made them nervous. She told William F. Buckley, Jr., on first meeting him, that he was "too intelligent to believe in God," and she was bothered by "frequent allusions to religion" from even Barry Goldwater, the most secularly libertarian candidate the Republican Party ever nominated. She had no time at all for Ronald Reagan, and, even before the emergence of the Christian right, was out of step with conservatives on many big issues of the moment. Her principles made her oppose not only the draft but also the war in Vietnam. Burns credits Objectivism with helping "to moor the libertarian movement to the right side of the political spectrum" instead of some anarchic docking on the left, but Rand inevitably found fault with the Libertarians who organized themselves into an actual political party, calling them plagiarizing "scum." In trying to estimate Rand's influence during the late nineteen-sixties, Burns resorts to detailed discussion of ideological fissures within the Young Americans for Freedom ("There were definite limits to YAF's antistatism"), which suggests that Rand's impact in the political realm has been a matter for footnotes rather than anything fundamental.

What endures of her is best located not in any movement but, reasonably enough, among individual entrepreneurs, people who have put their own glinting bits of Rearden Metal into the culture: Stewart Brand ("Whole Earth Catalogue"), Craig Newmark (Craigslist), and Jimmy Wales (Wikipedia) all admit to having been influenced by Rand's work. Heller herself was introduced to it by the personal-finance disciplinarian Suze Orman.



"I hope this is enough fibre to get us through the winter."

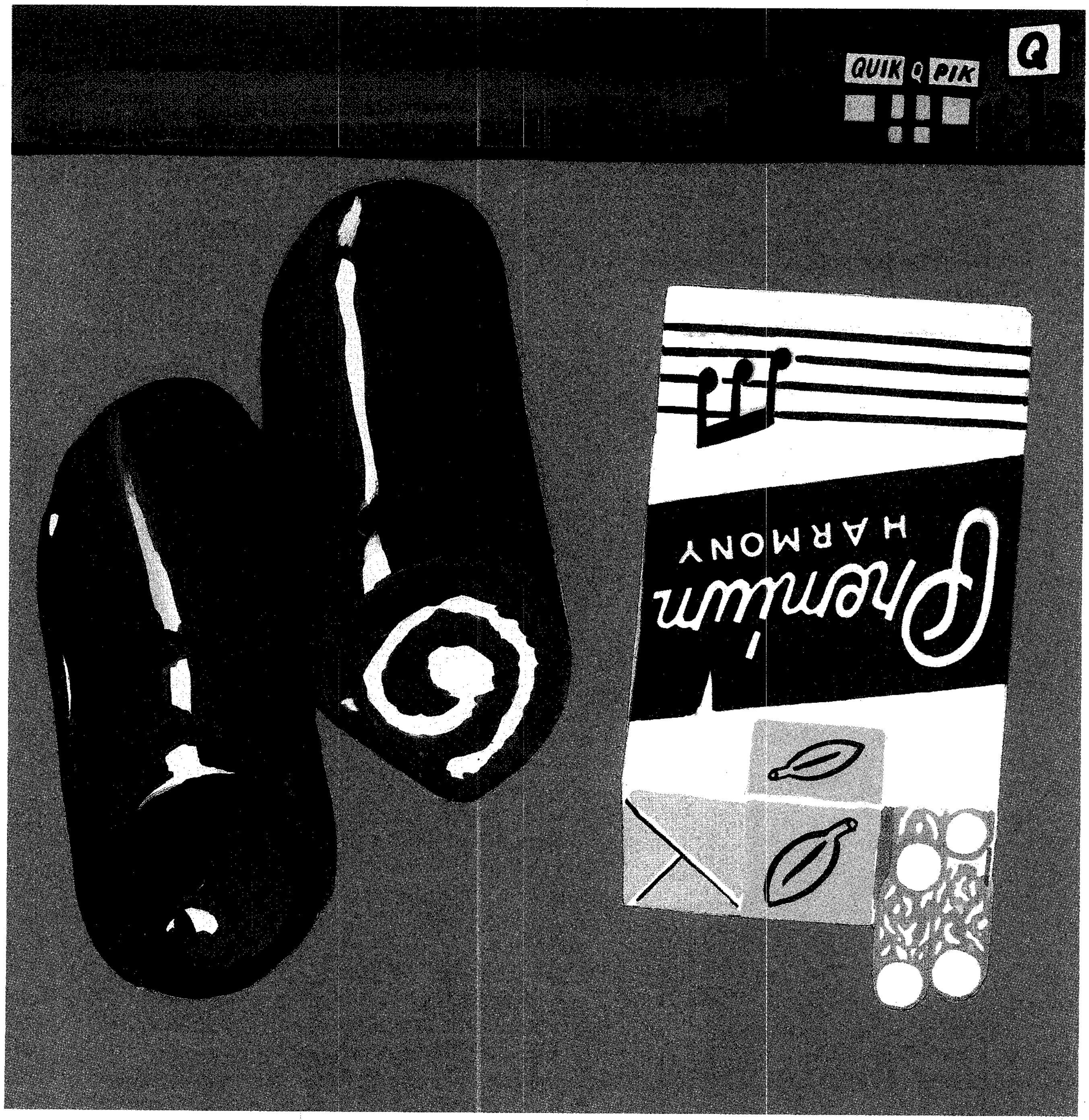
Today's Objectivists, who have lived through a long period of memoirs and revelations about the Branden affair, are divided between those who see Rand's philosophy as a closed theological system—this faction controls her estate—and others who regard her writings the way liberals do the Constitution, as material open to different interpretations amid changing times and circumstances. Both groups will presumably go see the latest planned movie version of "Atlas Shrugged," with Charlize Theron as Dagny Taggart, if it ever gets made.

Rand's last years were spent quietly, in Murray Hill, a neighborhood that incoming Objectivists had once turned into a kind of mini Galt's Gulch. She collected stamps, studied algebra, watched game shows, and played solitaire, all the while coping with the long mental decline of her husband. Until she finally took someone's advice to get into money-market funds, Rand kept all her considerable earnings in a passbook account at a nearby savings bank. When she died, in March of 1982, she was laid out at the Frank E. Campbell funeral home beside a six-foot-high dollar sign, made of flowers instead of gold. ♦

FICTION

PREMIUM HARMONY

BY STEPHEN KING


QUIK Q PIK
Q
Premium
HARMONY

They've been married for ten years and for a long time everything was O.K.—swell—but now they argue. Now they argue quite a lot. It's really all the same argument. It has circularity. It is, Ray thinks, like a dog track. When they argue, they're like greyhounds chasing the mechanical rabbit. You go past the same scenery time after time, but you don't see it. You see the rabbit.

He thinks it might be different if they'd had kids, but she couldn't. They finally got tested, and that's what the doctor said. It was her problem. A year or so after that, he bought her a dog, a Jack Russell she named Biznezz. She'd spell it for people who asked. She loves that dog, but now they argue anyway.

They're going to Wal-Mart for grass seed. They've decided to sell the house—they can't afford to keep it—but Mary says they won't get far until they do something about the plumbing and get the lawn fixed. She says those bald patches make it look shanty Irish. It's because of the drought. It's been a hot summer and there's been no rain to speak of. Ray tells her grass seed won't grow without rain no matter how good it is. He says they should wait.

"Then another year goes by and we're still there," she says. "We can't wait another year, Ray. We'll be bankrupts."

When she talks, Biz looks at her from his place in the back seat. Sometimes he looks at Ray when Ray talks, but not always. Mostly he looks at Mary.

"What do you think?" he says. "It's going to rain just so you don't have to worry about going bankrupt?"

"We're in it together, in case you forgot," she says. They're driving through Castle Rock now. It's pretty dead. What Ray calls "the economy" has disappeared from this part of Maine. The Wal-Mart is on the other side of town, near the high school where Ray is a janitor. The Wal-Mart has its own stoplight. People joke about it.

"Penny wise and pound foolish," he says. "You ever hear that one?"

"A million times, from you."

He grunts. He can see the dog in the rearview mirror, watching her. He sort of hates the way Biz does that. It occurs to him that neither of them knows what they are talking about.

"And pull in at the Quik-Pik," she says. "I want to get a kickball for Tallie's birthday." Tallie is her brother's little girl. Ray supposes that makes her his niece, although he's not sure that's right, since all the blood is on Mary's side.

"They have balls at Wal-Mart," Ray says. "And everything's cheaper at Wally World."

"The ones at Quik-Pik are purple. Purple is her favorite color. I can't be sure there'll be purple at Wal-Mart."

"If there aren't, we'll stop at the Quik-Pik on the way back." He feels a great weight pressing down on his head. She'll get her way. She always does on things like this. He sometimes thinks marriage is like a football game and he's quarterbacking the underdog team. He has to pick his spots. Make short passes.

"It'll be on the wrong side coming back," she says—as if they are caught in a torrent of city traffic instead of rolling through an almost deserted little town where most of the stores are for sale. "I'll just dash in and get the ball and dash right back out."

At two hundred pounds, Ray thinks, your dashing days are over.

"They're only ninety-nine cents," she says. "Don't be such a pinchpenny."

Don't be so pound foolish, he thinks, but what he says is "Buy me a pack of smokes while you're in there. I'm out."

"If you quit, we'd have an extra forty dollars a week. Maybe more."

He saves up and pays a friend in South Carolina to ship him a dozen cartons at a time. They're twenty dollars a carton cheaper in South Carolina. That's a lot of money, even in this day and age. It's not like he doesn't try to economize. He has told her this before and will again, but what's the point? In one ear, out the other.

"I used to smoke two packs a day," he says. "Now I smoke less than half a pack." Actually, most days he smokes more. She knows it, and Ray knows she knows it. That's marriage after a while. The weight on his head gets a little heavier. Also, he can see Biz still looking at her. He feeds the damn dog, and he makes the money that pays for the food, but it's her he's looking at. And Jack Russells are supposed to be smart.

He turns into the Quik-Pik.

"You ought to buy them on Indian Island if you've got to have them," she says.

"They haven't sold tax-free smokes on the rez for ten years," he says. "I've told you that, too. You don't listen." He pulls past the gas pumps and parks beside the store. There's no shade. The sun is directly overhead. The car's air-conditioner only works a little. They are both sweating. In the back seat, Biz is panting. It makes him look like he's grinning.

"Well, you ought to quit," Mary says.

"And you ought to quit those Little Debbies," he says. He doesn't want to say this—he knows how sensitive she is about her weight—but out it comes. He can't hold it back. It's a mystery.

"I don't eat those no more," she says. "Any, I mean. Anymore."

"Mary, the box is on the top shelf. A twenty-four-pack. Behind the flour."

"Were you snooping?" A flush rises in her cheeks, and he sees how she looked when she was still beautiful. Good-looking, anyway. Everybody said she was good-looking, even his mother, who didn't like her otherwise.

"I was hunting for the bottle opener," he says. "I had a bottle of cream soda. The kind with the old-fashioned cap."

"Looking for it on the top shelf of the goddam cupboard!"

"Go in and get the ball," he says. "And get me some smokes. Be a sport."

"Can't you wait until we get home? Can't you even wait that long?"

"You can get the cheap ones," he says. "That off-brand. Premium Harmony, they're called." They taste like homemade shit, but all right. If she'll only shut up about it.

"Where are you going to smoke, anyway? In the car, I suppose, so I have to breathe it."

"I'll open the window. I always do."

"I'll get the ball. Then I'll come back. If you still feel you have to spend four dollars and fifty cents to poison your lungs, you can go in. I'll sit with the baby."

Ray hates it when she calls Biz the baby. He's a dog, and he may be as bright as Mary likes to boast when they have company, but he still shits outside and licks where his balls used to be.

"Buy a few Twinkies while you're at it," he tells her. "Or maybe they're having a special on Ho Hos."

"You're so mean," she says. She gets out of the car and slams the door. He's parked too close to the concrete cube of a building and she has to sidle until she's past the trunk of the car, and he knows she knows he's looking at her, seeing how she's now so big she has to sidle. He

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knows she thinks he parked close to the building on purpose, to make her sidle, and maybe he did.

"Well, Biz, old buddy, it's just you and me."

Biz lies down on the back seat and closes his eyes. He may stand up on his back paws and shuffle around for a few seconds when Mary puts on a record and tells him to dance, and if she tells him (in a jolly voice) that he's a *bad boy* he may go into the corner and sit facing the wall, but he still shits outside.

He sits there and she doesn't come out. Ray opens the glove compartment. He paws through the rat's nest of papers, looking for some cigarettes he might have forgotten, but there aren't any. He does find a Hostess Sno Ball still in its wrapper. He pokes it. It's as stiff as a corpse. It's got to be a thousand years old. Maybe older. Maybe it came over on the Ark.

"Everybody has his poison," he says. He unwraps the Sno Ball and tosses it into the back seat. "Want that, Biz?"

Biz snarks the Sno Ball in two bites. Then he sets to work licking up bits of coconut off the seat. Mary would pitch a bitch, but Mary's not here.

Ray looks at the gas gauge and sees it's down to half. He could turn off the motor and roll down the windows, but then he'd really bake. Sitting here in the sun, waiting for her to buy a purple plastic kickball for ninety-nine cents when he knows they could get one for seventy-nine cents at Wal-Mart. Only that one might be yellow or red. Not good enough for Tallie. Only purple for the princess.

He sits there and Mary doesn't come back. "Christ on a pony!" he says. Cool air trickles from the vents. He thinks again about turning off the engine, saving some gas, then thinks, Fuck it. She won't weaken and bring him the smokes, either. Not even the cheap off-brand. This he knows. He had to make that remark about the Little Debbies.

He sees a young woman in the rearview mirror. She's jogging toward the car. She's even heavier than Mary; great big tits shuffle back and forth under her blue smock. Biz sees her coming and starts to bark.

Ray cracks the window an inch or two.

"Are you with the blond-haired woman who just came in? She your wife?" She puffs the words. Her face shines with sweat.

"Yes. She wanted a ball for our niece."

"Well, something's wrong with her. She fell down. She's unconscious. Mr. Ghosh thinks she might have had a heart attack. He called 911. You better come."

Ray locks the car and follows her into the store. It's cold inside. Mary is lying on the floor with her legs spread and her arms at her sides. She's next to a wire cylinder full of kickballs. The sign over the wire cylinder says "Hot Fun in the Summertime." Her eyes are closed. She might be sleeping there on the linoleum. Three people are standing over her. One is a dark-skinned man in khaki pants and a white shirt. A nametag on the pocket of his shirt says "MR. GHOSH MANAGER." The other two are customers. One is a thin old man without much hair. He's in his seventies at least. The other is a fat woman. She's fatter than Mary. Fatter than the girl in the blue smock, too. Ray thinks by rights she's the one who should be lying on the floor.

"Sir, are you this lady's husband?" Mr. Ghosh asks.

"Yes," Ray says. That doesn't seem to be enough. "Yes, I am."

"I am sorry to say, but I think she might be dead," Mr. Ghosh says. "I gave the artificial respiration and the mouth-to-mouth, but . . ."

Ray thinks of the dark-skinned man putting his mouth on Mary's. French-kissing her, sort of. Breathing down her throat right next to the wire cylinder full of plastic kickballs. Then he kneels down.

"Mary," he says. "Mary!" Like he's trying to wake her up after a hard night.

She doesn't appear to be breathing, but you can't always tell. He puts his ear by her mouth and hears nothing. He feels air on his skin, but that's probably just the air-conditioning.

"This gentleman called 911," the fat woman says. She's holding a bag of Bugles.

"Mary!" Ray says. Louder this time, but he can't quite bring himself to shout, not down on his knees with people standing around. He looks up and says, apologetically, "She never gets sick. She's healthy as a horse."

"You never know," the old man says. He shakes his head.

"She just fell down," the young woman

in the blue smock says. "Not a word."

"Did she grab her chest?" the fat woman with the Bugles asks.

"I don't know," the young woman says. "I guess not. Not that I saw. She just fell down."

There's a rack of souvenir T-shirts near the kickballs. They say things like "My Parents Were Treated Like Royalty in Castle Rock and All I Got Was This Lousy Tee-Shirt." Mr. Ghosh takes one and says, "Would you like me to cover her face, sir?"

"God, no!" Ray says, startled. "She might only be unconscious. We're not doctors." Past Mr. Ghosh, he sees three kids, teen-agers, looking in the window. One has a cell phone. He's using it to take a picture.

Mr. Ghosh follows Ray's look and rushes at the door, flapping his hands. "You kids get out of here! You kids get out!"

Laughing, the teen-agers shuffle backward, then turn and jog past the gas pumps to the sidewalk. Beyond them, the nearly deserted downtown shimmers. A car goes by pulsing rap. To Ray, the bass sounds like Mary's stolen heartbeat.

"Where's the ambulance?" the old man says. "How come it's not here yet?"

Ray kneels by his wife while the time goes by. His back hurts and his knees hurt, but if he gets up he'll look like a spectator.

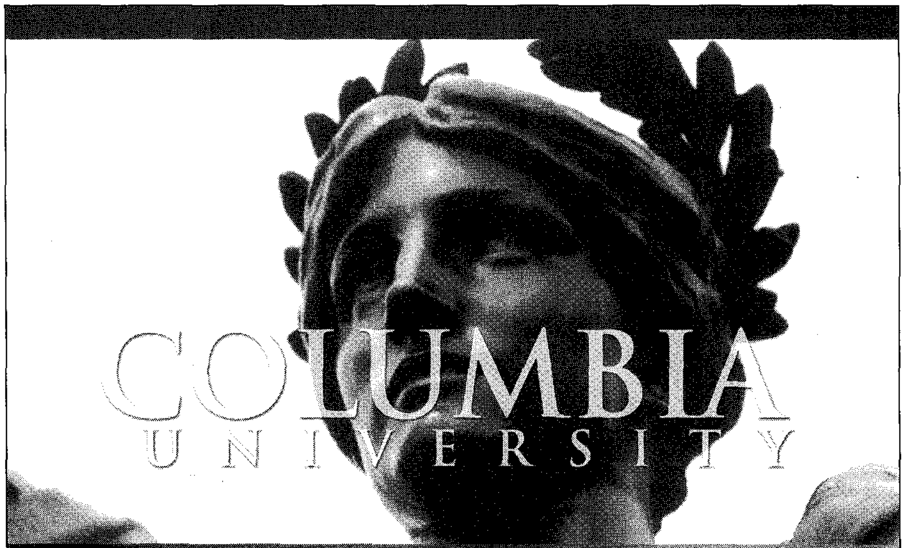
The ambulance turns out to be a Chevy Suburban painted white with orange stripes. The red jackpot lights are flashing. "CASTLE COUNTY RESCUE" is printed across the front, only backward, so you can read it in your rearview mirror.

The two men who come in are dressed in white. They look like waiters. One pushes an oxygen tank on a dolly. It's a green tank with an American-flag decal on it. "Sorry," he says. "Just cleared a car accident over in Oxford."

The other one sees Mary lying on the floor. "Aw, gee," he says.

Ray can't believe it. "Is she still alive?" he asks. "Is she just unconscious? If she is, you better give her oxygen or she'll have brain damage."

Mr. Ghosh shakes his head. The young woman in the blue smock starts to cry. Ray wants to ask her what she's crying about, then knows. She has made up a whole story about him from what he just said. Why, if he came back in a week or so and played his cards right, she might toss him a mercy



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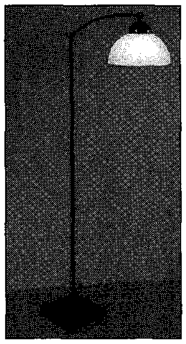

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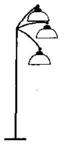

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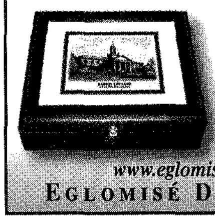

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fuck. Not that he *would*, but he sees that maybe he could. If he wanted to.

Mary's eyes don't react to the ophthalmoscope. One E.M.T. listens to her nonexistent heartbeat, and the other takes her nonexistent blood pressure. It goes on like that for a while. The teenagers come back with some of their friends. Other people, too. Ray guesses they're being drawn by the flashing red lights on top of the Suburban the way bugs are drawn to a porch light. Mr. Ghosh takes another run at them, flapping his arms. They back away again. Then, when Mr. Ghosh returns to the circle around Mary and Ray, they come back.

One of the E.M.T.s says to Ray, "She was your wife?"

"Right."

"Well, sir, I'm sorry to say that she's dead."

"Mary, Mother of God," the fat lady with the Bugles says. She crosses herself.

"Oh." Ray stands up. His knees crack. "They told me she was."

Mr. Ghosh offers one of the E.M.T.s the souvenir T-shirt to put over Mary's face, but the E.M.T. shakes his head and goes outside. He tells the little crowd that there's nothing to see, as if anyone's going to believe a dead woman on the Quik-Pik floor isn't interesting.

The E.M.T. yanks a gurney from the back of the rescue vehicle. He does it with a single flip of the wrist. The legs fold down all by themselves. The old man with the thinning hair holds the door open and the E.M.T. pulls his rolling deathbed inside.

"Whoo, hot," the E.M.T. says, wiping his forehead.

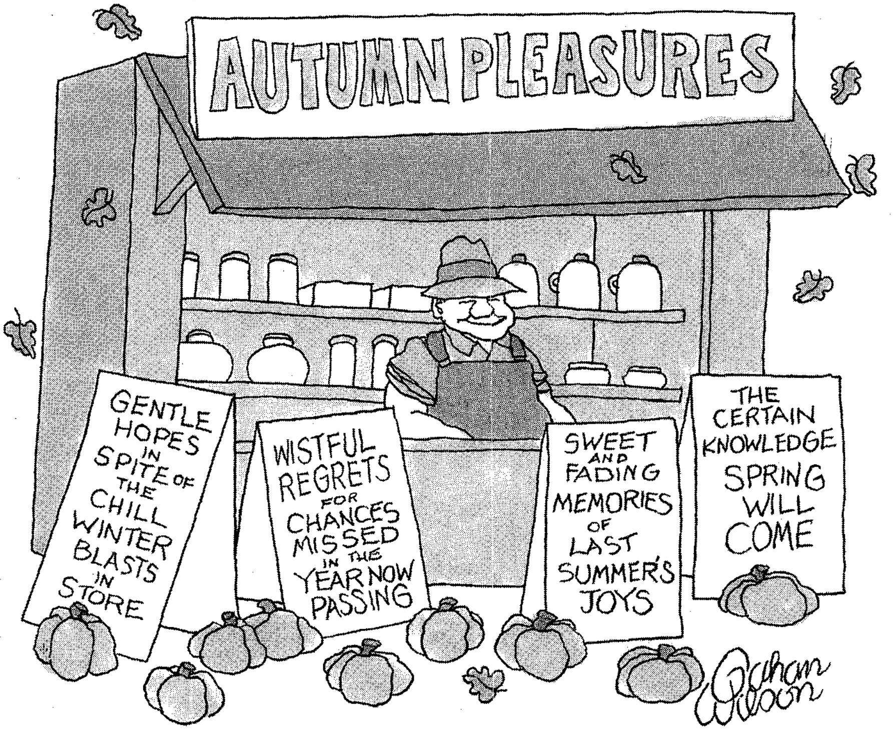
"You may want to turn away for this part, sir," the other one says, but Ray watches as they lift her onto the gurney. A sheet has been tucked down at the end of it. They pull it up all the way, until it's over her face. Now Mary looks like a corpse in a movie. They roll her out into the heat. This time, the fat woman with the Bugles holds the door for them. The crowd has retreated to the sidewalk. There must be three dozen people standing in the unrelieved August sunshine.

When Mary is stored, the E.M.T.s come back. One is holding a clipboard. He asks Ray about twenty-five questions. Ray can answer all but the one about her age. Then he remembers she's three years younger than he is and tells them thirty-five.

"We're going to take her to St. Stevie's," the E.M.T. with the clipboard says. "You can follow us if you don't know where that is."

"I know," Ray says. "What? Do you want to do an autopsy? Cut her up?"

The girl in the blue smock gives a gasp. Mr. Ghosh puts his arm around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her, and she puts her face against his white shirt. Ray wonders if Mr. Ghosh is fucking her. He hopes not. Not because of Mr. Ghosh's brown skin but because he's got to be twice her age.

"Well, that's not our decision," the E.M.T. says, "but probably not. She didn't die unattended—"

"I'll say," the woman with the Bugles interjects.

"—and it's pretty clearly a heart attack. You can probably have her released to the mortuary almost immediately."

Mortuary? An hour ago they were in the car, arguing. "I don't have a mortuary," Ray says. "Not a mortuary, a burial plot, nothing. What the hell? She's thirty-five."

The two E.M.T.s exchange a look. "Mr. Burkett, there'll be someone to help you with all that at St. Stevie's. Don't worry about it."

The E.M.T. wagon pulls out with the lights still flashing but the siren off. The crowd on the sidewalk starts to break up. The countergirl, the old man, the fat woman, and Mr. Ghosh look at Ray as though he's someone special. A celebrity.

"She wanted a purple kickball for our niece," he says. "She's having a birthday. She'll be eight. Her name is Talia. Tallie for short. She was named for an actress."

Mr. Ghosh takes a purple kickball from the wire rack and holds it out to Ray in both hands. "On the house," he says.

"Thank you, sir," Ray says, trying to sound equally solemn, and the woman with the Bugles bursts into tears. "Mary, Mother of God," she says. She likes that one.

They stand around for a while, talking. Mr. Ghosh gets sodas from the cooler. These are also on the house. They drink their sodas and Ray tells them a few things about Mary. He tells them how she made a quilt that took third prize at the Castle County fair. That was in '02. Or maybe '03.

"That's so sad," the woman with the Bugles says. She has opened them and shared them around. They eat and drink.

"My wife went in her sleep," the old man with the thinning hair says. "She just laid down on the sofa and never woke up. We were married thirty-seven years. I always expected I'd go first, but that's not the way the good Lord wanted it. I can still see her laying there on the sofa."

Finally, Ray runs out of things to tell them, and they run out of things to tell him. Customers are coming in again. Mr. Ghosh waits on some, and the woman in the blue smock waits on others. Then the fat woman says she really has to go. She gives Ray a kiss on the cheek before she does.

"Now you need to see to your business, Mr. Burkett," she tells him. Her tone is both reprimanding and flirtatious.

He looks at the clock over the counter. It's the kind with a beer advertisement on it. Almost two hours have gone by since Mary went sidling between the car and the cinder-block side of the Quik-Pik. And for the first time he thinks of Biz.

When he opens the door, heat rushes out at him, and when he puts his hand on the steering wheel to lean in he pulls it back with a cry. It's got to be a hundred and thirty in there. Biz is dead on his back. His eyes are milky. His tongue is protruding from the side of his mouth. Ray can see the wink of his teeth. There are little bits of coconut caught in his whiskers. That shouldn't be funny, but it is. Not funny enough to laugh at, but funny.

"Biz, old buddy," he says. "I'm sorry. I forgot you were in here."

Great sadness and amusement sweep over him as he looks at the baked Jack Russell. That anything so sad should be funny is just a crying shame.

"Well, you're with her now, ain't you?" he says, and this is so sad that he begins to cry. It's a hard storm. While he's crying, it comes to him that now he can smoke all he wants, and anywhere in the house. He can smoke right there at her dining-room table.

"You're with her now, Biz," he says again through his tears. His voice is clogged and thick. It's a relief to sound just right for the situation. "Poor old Mary, poor old Biz. Damn it all!"

Still crying, and with the purple kickball still tucked under his arm, he goes back into the Quik-Pik. He tells Mr. Ghosh he forgot to get cigarettes. He thinks maybe Mr. Ghosh will give him a pack of Premium Harmonys on the house as well, but Mr. Ghosh's generosity doesn't stretch that far. Ray smokes all the way to the hospital with the windows shut and the air-conditioning on. ♦

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FLESH OF YOUR FLESH

Should you eat meat?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

Americans love animals. Forty-six million families in the United States own at least one dog, and thirty-eight million keep cats. Thirteen million maintain freshwater aquariums in which swim a total of more than a hundred and seventy million fish. Collectively, these creatures cost Americans some forty billion dollars annually. (Seventeen billion goes to food and another twelve billion to veterinary bills.) Despite the recession, pet-related expenditures this year are expected to increase five per cent over 2008, in part owing to outlays on luxury items like avian manicures and canine bath spritz. “We have so many customers who say they’d eat macaroni and cheese before they’d cut back on their dogs,” a Colorado pet-store owner recently told the Denver *Post.* In a survey released this past August, more than half of all dog, cat, and bird owners reported having bought presents for their animals during the previous twelve months, often for no special occasion, just out of love. (Fish enthusiasts may bring home fewer gifts, but they spend more on each one, with the average fish gift coming to thirty-seven dollars.) A majority of owners report that one of the reasons they enjoy keeping pets is that they consider them part of the family.

Americans also love to eat animals. This year, they will cook roughly twenty-seven billion pounds of beef, sliced from some thirty-five million cows. Additionally, they will consume roughly twenty-three billion pounds of pork, or the bodies of more than a hundred and fifteen million pigs, and thirty-eight billion pounds of poultry, some nine billion birds. Most of these creatures have been raised under conditions that are, as Americans know—or, at least, by this point have no excuse *not* to know—barbaric. Broiler chickens, also known, depending on size, as fryers or roasters, typically spend their lives in windowless sheds, packed in with upward of thirty thousand other birds and generations of accumulated waste. The ammonia fumes thrown off by their rotting excrement lead to breast blisters, leg sores, and respiratory disease. Bred to produce the maximum amount of meat in the minimum amount of time, fryers often become so top-heavy that they can’t support their own weight. At slaughtering time, they are shackled by their feet, hung from a conveyor belt, and dipped into an electrified bath known as “the stunner.”

For pigs, conditions are little better. Shortly after birth, piglets have their tails chopped off; this discourages the bored and frustrated animals from gnawing one another’s rumps. Male piglets also have their testicles removed, a procedure performed without anesthetic. Before being butchered, hogs are typically incapacitated with a tonglike instrument designed to induce cardiac arrest. Sometimes their muscles contract so violently that they end up not just dead but with a broken back.

How is it that Americans, so solicitous of the animals they keep as pets, are so indifferent toward the ones they cook for dinner? The answer cannot lie in the beasts themselves. Pigs, after all, are quite companionable, and dogs are said to be delicious.

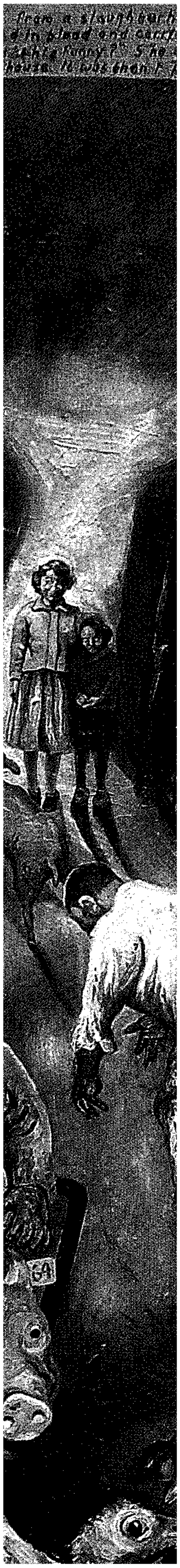
This inconsistency is the subject of Jonathan Safran Foer’s “Eating Animals” (Little, Brown; $25.99). Unlike Foer’s two previous books, “Everything Is Illuminated” and “Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,” his latest is nonfiction. The task it sets itself is less to make sense of our behavior than to show how, when our stomachs are involved, it is often senseless. “Food choices are determined by many factors, but reason (even consciousness) is not generally high on the list,” Foer writes.

Foer was just nine years old when the problem of being an “eating animal” first presented itself. One evening, his parents left him and his older brother with a babysitter and a platter of chicken. The babysitter declined to join the boys for dinner.

“You know that chicken is chicken, right?” she pointed out. Foer’s older brother sniggered. Where had their parents found this moron? But Foer was shaken. That chicken was a chicken! Why had he never thought of this before? He put down his fork. Within a few years, however, he went back to eating chickens and other animals. During high school and college, he converted to vegetarianism several more times, partly to salve his conscience and partly, as he puts it, “to get closer to the breasts” of female activists. Later, he became engaged to a woman (the novelist Nicole Krauss) with a similar history of relapse. They resolved to do better, and immediately violated that resolve by serving meat at their wedding and eating it on their honeymoon. Finally, when he was about to become a father, Foer felt compelled to think about the issue more deeply, and, at the same time, to write about it. “We decided to have a child, and that was a different story that would necessitate a different story,” he says.

Foer ends up telling several stories, though all have the same horrific ending. One is about shit. Animals, he explains, produce a lot of it. Crowded into “concentrated animal feeding operations,” or CAFOs, they can produce entire cities’

This year, Americans will consume some thirty-five million cows, a hundred and fifteen million pigs, and nine billion birds.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worth. (The pigs processed by a single company, Smithfield Foods, generate as much excrement as all of the human residents of the states of California and Texas combined.) Unlike cities, though, CAFOs have no waste-treatment systems. The shit simply gets dumped in holding ponds. Imagine, Foer writes, if "every man, woman, and child in every city and town in all of California and all of Texas crapped and pissed in a huge open-air pit for a day. Now imagine that they don't do this for just a day, but all year round, in perpetuity." Not surprisingly, the shit in the ponds tends to migrate to nearby streams and rivers, causing algae blooms that kill fish and leave behind aquatic "dead zones." According to the Environmental Protection Agency, some thirty-five thousand miles of American waterways have been contaminated by animal excrement.

Another of Foer's stories is about microbes. In the U.S., Foer reports, people are prescribed about three million pounds of antibiotics a year. Livestock are fed nearly twenty-eight million pounds, according to the drug industry. By pumping cows and chickens full of antibiotics, farmers have been instrumental in producing new, resistant strains of germs—so-called superbugs. As soon as the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of a class of drugs known as fluoroquinolones in chickens, for instance, the percentage of bacteria resistant to fluoroquinolones shot up. Officials at many health organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control, have called for an end to the indiscriminate use of antibiotics on farms, but, of course, the practice continues.

A third story is about suffering. Intuitively, we all know that animals feel pain. (This, presumably, is why we spend so much money on vet bills.) "No reader of this book would tolerate someone swinging a pickax at a dog's face," Foer observes. And yet, he notes, we routinely eat fish that have been killed in this way, as well as chickens who have been dragged through the stunner and pigs who have been electrocuted and cows who have had bolts shot into their heads. (In many cases, the cows are not quite killed by the bolts, and so remain conscious as they are skinned and dismembered.)

Foer relates how, one night, he sneaked onto a California turkey farm with an animal-rights activist he calls C. Most of the buildings were locked, but the two managed to slip into a shed that housed tens of thousands of turkey chicks. At first, the conditions seemed not so bad. Some of the chicks were sleeping. Others were struggling to get closer to the heat lamps that substitute for their mothers. Then Foer started noticing how many of the chicks were dead. They were covered with sores, or matted with blood, or withered like dry leaves. C spotted one chick splayed out on the floor, trembling. Its eyes were crusted over and its head was shaking back and forth. C slit its throat.

"If you stop and think about it, it's crazy," she later told Foer. "How would you judge an artist who mutilated animals in a gallery because it was visually arresting? How riveting would the sound of a tortured animal need to be to make you want to hear it *that* badly? Try to imagine any end other than taste for which it would be justifiable to do what we do to farmed animals."

One day while in Berlin, Franz Kafka went to visit the city's famous aquarium. According to his friend and biographer Max Brod, Kafka, gazing into the illuminated tanks, addressed the fish directly. "Now at last I can look at you in peace," he told them. "I don't eat you anymore."

Kafka, who became what Brod calls a *strenger Vegetarianer*—a strict vegetarian—is one of the heroes of "Eating Animals." So is the philosopher Jacques Derrida, and a vegan theology professor named Aaron Gross, who is working on plans for a model slaughterhouse. "This is not paradoxical or ironic," Gross says of his slaughterhouse work.

Foer's villains include Smithfield, Tyson Foods, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and—rather more surprisingly—Michael Pollan. There is perhaps no more influential critic of the factory farm than Pollan, and Foer acknowledges that he "has written as thoughtfully about food as anyone." But when Pollan looks at animals he doesn't feel worried or guilty or embarrassed. He feels, well, hungry.

"I have to say there is a part of me that envies the moral clarity of the vegetarian, the blamelessness of the tofu eater," Pollan observes toward the end of his book "The Omnivore's Dilemma," shortly after describing the thrill of shooting a pig. "Yet part of me pities him, too. Dreams of innocence are just that; they usually depend on a denial of reality that can be its own form of hubris."

According to Pollan, it is naïve to see domesticated animals as victims. Some ten thousand years ago, "a handful of especially opportunistic species discovered . . . that they were more likely to survive and prosper in an alliance with humans than on their own," he writes. The results speak for themselves. Domesticated chickens have never been more numerous, even as the Red Burmese jungle fowl from which they descended is disappearing. Meanwhile, if animals have had to make adjustments to live with people, the reverse is also the case. Humans developed the ability to digest lactose into adulthood, for example, only as a consequence of keeping cows.

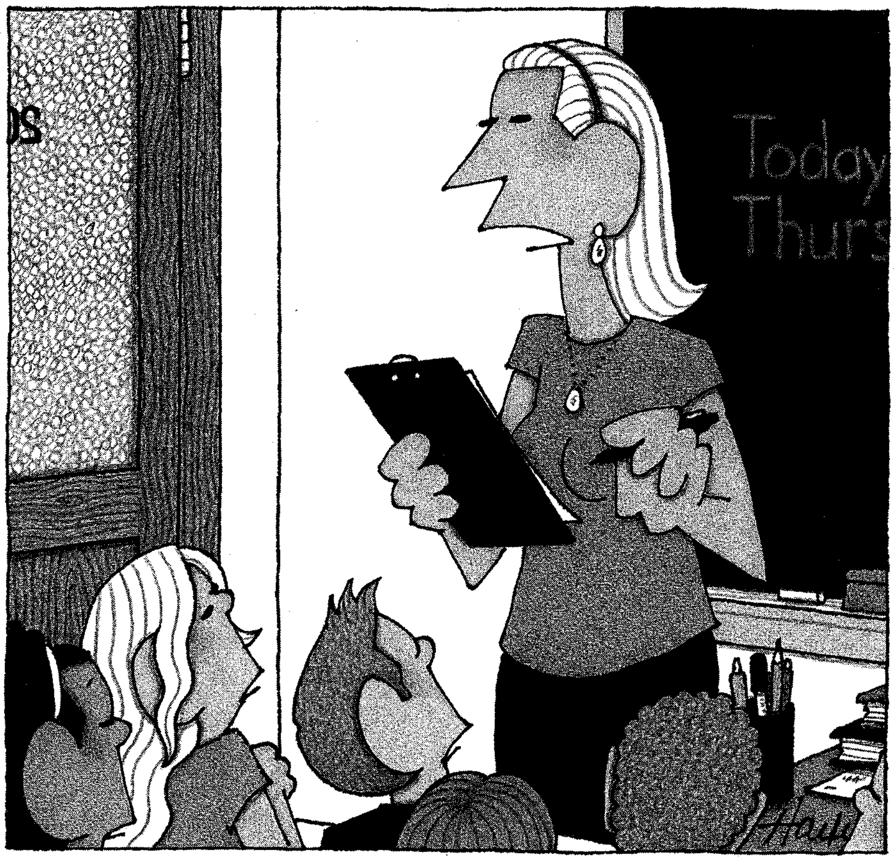
Given this history, Pollan says, it's too late for people to start worrying about eating animals. The problem with factory-farmed meat isn't the meat; it's the factory. The solution is to return animals to the sorts of places where they can graze and root and fly—or at least flap around—before being dispatched. "I don't eat industrial meat anymore," Pollan recently told *Newsweek*. "I eat grass-fed beef, organic chicken from a place I know."

Foer finds Pollan's account of interspecies alliances unpersuasive. "Chickens can do many things," he notes, but they cannot make "sophisticated deals with humans." And, in any case, if they could, shouldn't the same terms apply to pets? Once we're done showering Kitty and Fido with trinkets, let's bleed them out and fry them up: "If we let dogs be dogs, and breed without interference, we would create a sustainable, local meat supply with low energy inputs that would put even the most efficient grass-based farming to shame," Foer writes.

Meanwhile, the notion that factory-farmed meat can be replaced with boutique-bred beef depends on its own denial of reality: "There isn't enough nonfactory chicken produced in America to feed the population of Staten Island and not enough nonfactory pork to serve New York City, let alone the country."

Foer seems particularly incensed by the suggestion that deciding *not* to eat meat represents a delusion of innocence or, worse still, sentimentality. "Two friends are ordering lunch," he writes:

> One says, "I'm in the mood for a burger," and orders it. The other says, "I'm in the mood for a burger," but remembers that there are things more important to him than what he is in the mood for at any given moment, and orders something else. Who is the sentimentalist?



"Will Kristen, Kirsten, and Kiersten please choose new names?"

• •

Of the four hundred and fifty billion chickens currently being raised in the United States, a dozen live in my back yard. They were shipped six months ago as chicks, and arrived at the local post office in a cardboard box. Now full-grown, they spend their days laying eggs, pecking around in the grass, and shitting on the walkways. The chickens are happy, or so I dream, as I sit at the window when evening falls.

Much of the credit (or blame) for the back-yard-chicken fad belongs to the "local food" movement, which Pollan helped launch. When I ordered my chickens, from a hatchery in Missouri, it was with the idea that my children could learn what it's like to raise what you eat. I also hoped, in a more Foerian vein, that the experience might prompt a reëvaluation of their relationship with chicken fingers. Recently, I asked whether they would consider becoming vegetarians. One of my sons proposed that, instead of dropping meat, we eat it exclusively. We could, he suggested, call ourselves "mea-gans."

By this point, my kids certainly know that "chicken is chicken," and also that beef is cows and pork is pigs. About a mile away, there's a farm with its own little store. Every so often, some piglets arrive at the farm. My sons like to go watch the piglets roll around in the mud. Then they like to go to the store and purchase the sausages that have been made from the piglets' predecessors.

In this way, the boys are a lot like the chickens. Though the hens have plenty of feed in their coop, they prefer to scratch in the dirt for living things. They are especially fond of centipedes and grubs. More than once, I've seen them pick up a red-spotted newt by its neck, shake it dead, then toss it aside. (The newts are poisonous, something the chickens apparently discover too late.) A few weeks ago, they cornered a small rabbit under a neighbor's car. Whether or not they were hoping to kill it, the creature was clearly terrified.

Very broadly speaking, there are two arguments to be made on behalf of eating animals. One is that people are animals. Different animals naturally have different diets; in our case, this diet includes meat. Our ancestors certainly liked a nice bone to gnaw on. Indeed, one theory of human development posits that a diet high in animal protein was what allowed human beings to become human in the first place. (As hominids' brains grew, the theory goes, they became better hunters; this allowed their guts to shrink, which facilitated further brain growth.) Studies of hunter-gatherer societies show that anywhere from twenty-six per cent (in the case of the Gwi, of southern Africa) to ninety-nine per cent (the Nunamiut, of Alaska) of their caloric intake comes from eating meat.

The second argument is that animals are not people. People may have obligations toward animals—to enforce these, there are laws against animal cruelty—but these obligations do not preclude ingesting them. Pollan contends that "people who care about animals should be working to ensure that the ones they eat don't suffer, and that their deaths are swift and painless." Similarly, the author and livestock expert Temple Grandin, who designs what are often called "humane slaughterhouses," argues, "We owe animals a decent life and a painless death." We "forget that nature can be harsh," she has written. "Death at the slaughter plant is quicker and less painful than death in the wild. Lions dining on the guts of a live animal is much worse in my opinion."

Foer's position is that all such arguments are, finally, bogus. We eat meat because we like to, and we devise justifications afterward. "Almost always, when I told someone I was writing a book about 'eating animals,' they assumed, even without knowing anything about my views, that it was a case for vegetarianism," he says. "It's a telling assumption, one that implies not only that a thorough inquiry into animal agriculture would lead one away from eating meat, but that most people already know that to be the case." What we know about eating animals is that we don't want to know. Although he never explicitly equates "concentrated animal feeding operations" with the Final Solution, the German model of at once seeing and not seeing clearly informs Foer's thinking. The book is framed by tales of his grandmother, a Holocaust survivor whose culinary repertoire consists of a single dish: roast chicken with carrots.

Foer's novels are pointedly postmodern; they play with voice and genre, language and typography. ("Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close" ends with a flip book of a body either falling out of or flying away from the World Trade Center.) "Eating Animals" is written in a similar po-mode; it is constantly shifting among formats—a glossary of terms, interviews, personal vignettes—and each chapter is introduced with a page or two of graphic art. The chapter titled "Hiding/Seeking," for example, opens with an outline of a box, sixty-seven squares in area, which is supposed to illustrate the amount of space allotted to a typical laying hen. Some may object that Foer's style is too playful (or gimmicky) for what he contends is a deadly serious subject. Others will argue that he lacks the courage of his convictions.

For much of "Eating Animals," it appears that Foer is arguing for vegetarianism as the only moral course. Then, it turns out, he isn't—or, at least, not quite. In the middle of the book, Foer becomes friendly with a farmer named Frank Reese, who raises what are known as "heritage" turkeys. (It is for Reese that Aaron Gross, the vegan theology professor, is trying to design a model—and also mobile—slaughterhouse.) Evolutionarily speaking, heritage turkeys fall somewhere between the wild variety that the colonists encountered and the obscenely large-breasted breeds that now fill the meat aisle. A heritage turkey is probably what your great-grandparents served if they celebrated Thanksgiving.

"I have placed my wager on a vegetarian diet *and* I have enough respect for people like Frank, who have bet on a more humane animal agriculture, to support their kind of farming," Foer writes. "This is not in the end a complicated position." But it *is*, or at least it's complicated to parse. If the problem with nonfactory chicken is that there isn't enough of it, how can heritage birds represent a solution? (There are barely enough heritage turkeys being raised in America to feed Tottenville, let alone all of Staten Island.) And what does it mean for Foer to "support" Reese's kind of farming while urging his readers to boycott his product?

Meanwhile, it could be argued that even a vegetarian diet falls short. As Foer is well aware, some of the animals that suffer most from the factory-farm system aren't the ones that end up on the table. Most dairy cows spend their lives in sheds, where they are milked two or three times a day by machine. Many develop chronic udder infections. Laying chickens are kept in cages, jammed in so tightly that they don't have room to spread their wings. To prevent them from cannibalizing one another, their beaks are trimmed with a hot blade. When their production begins to decline, they are starved for a week or two to reset their biological clocks. Foer never says anything about forgoing eggs or dairy, which seems to imply that he consumes them. In "The Face on Your Plate: The Truth About Food" (Norton; $24.95), Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson offers many of the same observations about factory farming as Foer. To align his food choices with his ethics, Masson writes, he had to take the "final step" and become a vegan.

But is even veganism really enough? The cost that consumer society imposes on the planet's fifteen or so million nonhuman species goes way beyond either meat or eggs. Bananas, bluejeans, soy lattes, the paper used to print this magazine, the computer screen you may be reading it on—death and destruction are embedded in them all. It is hard to think at all rigorously about our impact on other organisms without being sickened.

"Eating Animals" closes with a turkeyless Thanksgiving. As a holiday, it doesn't sound like a lot of fun. But this is Foer's point. We are, he suggests, defined not just by what we do; we are defined by what we are willing to do without. Vegetarianism requires the renunciation of real and irreplaceable pleasures. To Foer's credit, he is not embarrassed to ask this of us. ♦

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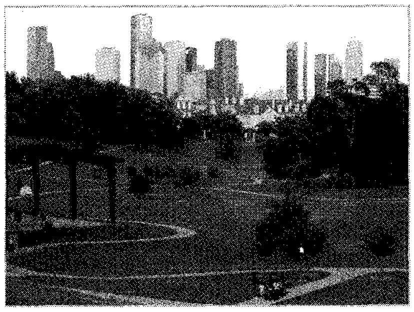

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

RAP SHEET

Why is American history so murderous?

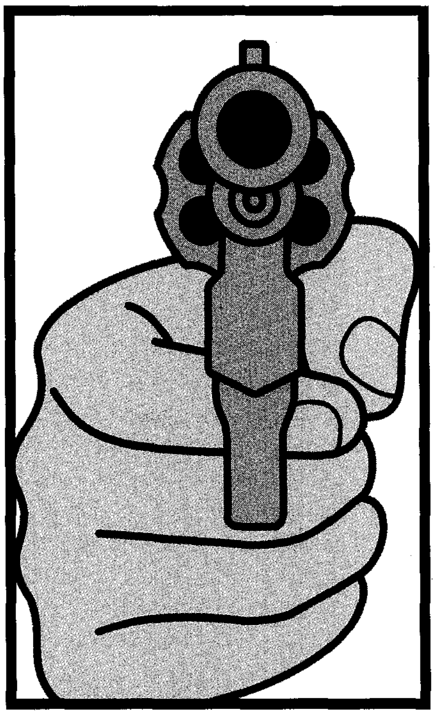
BY JILL LEPORE

Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky, who met three years ago in a Hartford drug-treatment center and shared a room in a halfway house in between stints in prison, were both seasoned burglars, though Hayes, a forty-four-year-old crack addict, was quite a bit older than Komisarjevsky, who was twenty-six, and the great-grandson of a Russian princess. In the spring of 2007, both men were paroled. Hayes, whose arrest record stretches back to 1980, had served about three years of a five-year sentence for third-degree burglary, and Komisarjevsky had finished half of a nine-year sentence for burglary in the second degree. Hayes moved in with his mother, in Winsted, in Litchfield County; Komisarjevsky went back to his home town, Cheshire, a suburb about fifteen miles north of New Haven. They kept in touch. On July 23, 2007, authorities say, Hayes and Komisarjevsky broke into the Cheshire home of William Petit, Jr., an endocrinologist, and tortured the family through the night, raping Petit's wife, Jennifer Hawke-Petit, and at least one of the couple's two daughters. In the morning, Hayes and Komisarjevsky are said to have forced Hawke-Petit, a school nurse who suffered from multiple sclerosis, into the family car and taken her to a local bank, where she withdrew fifteen thousand dollars, after which a suspicious teller alerted the police. The two men allegedly then took Hawke-Petit back to the house, killed her, set the house on fire, and fled in the Petits' S.U.V., though not far: they crashed into a police barricade, just past the driveway.

Inside the house, a four-bedroom Colonial, police found three bodies. Hawke-Petit, forty-eight, had been strangled. Seventeen-year-old Hayley Petit, who, that September, was to start college at Dartmouth, died of smoke inhalation. Her eleven-year-old sister, Michaela, was found tied to a bed, her body badly burned after having been doused with gasoline. Only William Petit, who had been bound with rope, beaten in the head with a baseball bat, and left for dead in the cellar, survived.

ANDERS WENNGREN

Hayes and Komisarjevsky have been charged with kidnapping, sexual assault, arson, and murder. Jury selection for Hayes's trial is scheduled to begin in January, in New Haven. William Petit, who is expected to testify about what happened that night, had asked not to be put through that ordeal twice, but his request for a single trial was denied. A trial date for Komisarjevsky has not yet been set. The state is seeking the death penalty.



Homicide may have a political dimension.

Every murder raises terrible questions that no trial, no law, no punishment can answer. What forces make it possible for one human being to take the life of another? Murders can be solved and even explained—at least, that's the operating assumption of criminal investigation and the narrative logic behind every whodunit—but to think about a specific murder with any clarity, or for very long, can be difficult, and viscerally painful. Maybe the brisk trade in lurid violence as spectacle has something to do with it: one either watches or averts one's eyes; dispassionate reflection rarely enters into it. Scholars ranging from theologians and psychologists to evolutionary biologists have offered theories about murder—theories of evil, theories of disease, theories of disposition—but the analytical burden placed on any general discussion of murder, freighted, as it is, with atrocity, is nearly unbearable. Nothing suffices, or can.

Between the convulsive emotional response to a single murder and an elusive general theory of murder lies another kind of contemplation: the study of the murderousness of nations. The United States has the highest homicide rate of any affluent democracy, nearly four times that of France and the United Kingdom, and six times that of Germany. Why? Historians haven't often asked this question. Even historians who like to try to solve cold cases usually cede to sociologists and other social scientists the study of what makes murder rates rise and fall, or what might account for why one country is more murderous than another. Only in the nineteen-seventies did historians begin studying homicide in any systematic way. In the United States, that effort was led by Eric Monkkonen, who died in 2005, his promising work unfinished. Monkkonen's research has been taken up by Randolph Roth, whose book "American Homicide" (Harvard; $45) offers a vast investigation of murder, in the aggregate, and over time. Roth's argument is profoundly unsettling. There is and always has been, he claims, an American way of murder. It is the price of our politics.

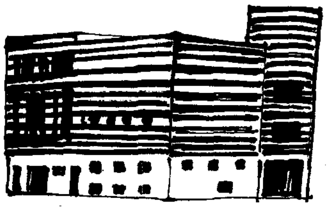
In the archives, murders are easier to count than other crimes. Rapes go unreported, thefts can be hidden, adultery isn't necessarily actionable, but murder will nearly always out. Murders enter the historical record through coroners' inquests, court transcripts, parish ledgers, and even tombstones. "Fell by the hands of William Beadle/an infatuated Man who closed the/horrid sacrifice of his Wife/& Children with his own destruction," reads the headstone of Lydia Beadle, of Wethersfield, Connecticut, who was murdered, along with her two children, in 1782. The number of uncounted murders, known as the "dark figure," is thought to be quite small. Given enough archival research, historians can conceivably count, with fair accuracy, the frequency with which people of earlier eras killed one another, with this caveat: the farther back you go in time—and the documentary trail doesn't go back much farther than 1300—the more fragmentary the record and the bigger the dark figure.

Pieter Spierenburg, a professor of historical criminology at Erasmus University, in Rotterdam, sifts through the evidence in "A History of Murder: Personal Violence in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present" (Polity; $24.95). In Europe, homicide rates, conventionally represented as the number of murder victims per hundred thousand people in the population per year, have been falling for centuries. Spierenburg attributes this long decline to what the German sociologist Norbert Elias called the "civilizing process" (shorthand for a whole class of behaviors requiring physical restraint and self-control, right down to using a fork instead of eating with your hands or stabbing at your food with a knife), and to the growing power of the centralizing state to disarm civilians, control violence, enforce law and order, and, broadly, to hold a monopoly on the use of force. (Anthropologists sometimes talk about a related process, the replacement of a culture of honor with a culture of dignity.) In feuding medieval Europe, the murder rate hovered around thirty-five. Duels replaced feuds. Duels are more mannered; they also have a lower body count. By 1500, the murder rate in Western Europe had fallen to about twenty. Courts had replaced duels. By 1700, the murder rate had dropped to five. Today, that rate is generally well below two, where it has held steady, with minor fluctuations, for the past century.

In the United States, the picture could hardly be more different. The American homicide rate has been higher than Europe's from the start, and higher at just about every stage since. It has also fluctuated, sometimes wildly. During the Colonial period, the homicide rate fell, but in the nineteenth century, while Europe's kept sinking, the U.S. rate went up and up. In the twentieth century, the rate in the United States dropped to about five during the years following the Second World War, but then rose, reaching about eleven in 1991. It has since fallen once again, to just above five, a rate that is, nevertheless, twice that of any other affluent democracy.

What accounts for this remarkable difference? Guns leap to mind: in 2008, firearms were involved in two-thirds of all murders in the United States. Yet Roth, who supports gun control, insists that the prevalence of guns in America, and our lax gun laws, can't account for the whole spread, and a few scholars have argued that laws allowing concealed weapons actually lower the murder rate, by deterring assaults. Some Europeans suspect that Americans haven't undergone the same "civilizing process," as if, unmoored from Europe, Colonial Americans went murderously adrift. Spierenburg speculates that democracy came too soon to the United States. By the time European states became democracies, the populace had accepted the authority of the state. But the American Revolution happened before Americans had got used to the idea of a state monopoly on force. Americans therefore preserved for themselves not only the right to bear arms—rather than yielding that right to a strong central government—but also medieval manners: impulsiveness, crudeness, and fidelity to a culture of honor. We're backward, in other words, because we became free before we learned how to control ourselves.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, not everyone buys these arguments, and Monkkonen himself took a different, though equally conjectural, approach. At the time of his death, he had been working on an article called "Homicide: Explaining America's Exceptionalism," which hypothesized that four factors accounted for the centuries-long differences between American and European homicide rates: mobility, federalism, slavery, and tolerance. Mobility breaks social ties; federalism is a weak form of government; slavery not only rationalized a culture of violence among white Southerners (where the murder rate has been disproportionately high, as it has, and remains, in many of the so-called law-and-order states) but also infected American culture; and American judges and juries have historically proved less willing than their European counterparts to convict murderers, tolerating, among other crimes, racial murders and killings by jealous spouses.



Roth, who teaches at Ohio State, wants to bring into this debate hard facts and rigorous methods. He rejects arguments about the "civilizing process" by pointing out that people didn't necessarily intend to murder one another more often in the premodern world; they merely succeeded more often. Given modern medicine—emergency response, trauma surgery, antibiotics, and wound care—three out of every four people murdered before 1850 would probably survive today. Roth heads a collaborative project, dedicated to Monkkonen, called the Historical Violence Database, which has assembled reports of murders in several of the original thirteen colonies; nineteenth-century records from five states, seven cities, and thirty-four counties; and a wealth of twentieth-century statistics, chiefly from the Uniform Crime Reports kept by the F.B.I. beginning in 1930. As a discussion of the available data, "American Homicide" is rich, fascinating, and unrivalled. As an explanation, though, it gets dubious. Roth's work involves three steps: first, he uses his database to count murders (he's primarily interested in homicides among unrelated adults); then, using surviving censuses to count people, he calculates the homicide rate; finally, he attempts to explain what factors correlate with that rate, across four centuries. It's the last step that's the most wobbly.

Historians haven't studied murder much, but criminologists have. Although most criminologists trace the homicide rate back only a few decades, Roth takes his lead from their work. The fluctuations in the homicide rate since the nineteen-forties have at least something to do with demography. A vastly disproportionate number of murderers and murder victims are young adult men. When baby boomers reached that age bracket, the homicide rate soared. Now that they've aged out of their most lethal years, the rate has fallen. To Roth, the demographic explanation of the postwar crime boom and bust falls short, but, where other social scientists have investigated economic conditions like joblessness or government policies like gun control to fill the explanatory gap, Roth favors the argument made by a criminologist named Gary LaFree, in a

SOUTHEAST OF EDEN

Together they took the least space they could.
Entered each other deeply, to be less,
to throw one shadow only, to be still
for all the world while moving for each other.

—So space, so barely dented, might not bruise
and cry, and time come running. To this end
breaths went untaken till the only end
of that (this side of nothing): the great sigh
that gives the place away . . .
                    And out they come,
exiting one another with the kiss
to heal the bruise and be the bruise and there
they sit. The only angel in this case

came only there to point them, in their first
amazing silence, to two peaceful desks.

—*Glyn Maxwell*

book called "Losing Legitimacy: Street Crime and the Decline of Social Institutions in America" (1998). LaFree observed that the crime rate correlates, inversely, with public faith in government and trust in elected officials. So, for instance, the Vietnam era, marked by declining confidence in elected officials, experienced a rising crime rate. He measured that faith and trust by consulting national opinion surveys taken beginning in 1958, which asked questions like "How much of the time can you trust the government to do what is right?"

Roth attempts to graft LaFree's argument onto all of American history. He has determined that four factors correlate with the homicide rate: faith that government is stable and capable of enforcing just laws; trust in the integrity of legitimately elected officials; solidarity among social groups based on race, religion, or political affiliation; and confidence that the social hierarchy allows for respect to be earned without recourse to violence. When and where people hold these sentiments, the homicide rate is low; when and where they don't, it's high.

Whatever you think about the value of public-opinion polls, LaFree at least had them. Roth doesn't. How do you measure the belief that government is stable in 1695 or 1786 or 1814 or 1902? You can't. You can only look at what was happening in those years and tell a story about what you think people believed about their government, and, if you know what the homicide rate is, it's easy to find a story that fits your data. The homicide rate in New England fell from a high, in 1637, of a hundred and twenty to under one, in 1800, chiefly by dropping, rather dramatically, after the Pequot War and King Philip's War. Roth argues that the rate fell, over all, as judicial institutions were established and people developed faith in them, and that the rate fell, sharply, after these wars because conflicts with hostile neighbors brought the colonists together. But it seems equally plausible to argue that the homicide rate in Colonial New England tracks the European decline quite nicely, over all, and drops, in a stepwise fashion, after wars because they diminish the population of young men, leaving fewer potential murderers and murder victims around. Both interpretations make sense; neither has been demonstrated.

The implications of Roth's argument are, as he realizes, distressing. Democracy requires dissent. If a high American murder rate is a function of not placing our trust in government, are we doomed to endure a high murder rate? Roth takes his case all the way to the White House: "The statistics make it clear that in the twentieth century, homicide rates have fallen during the terms of presidents who have inspired the poor or have governed from the center with a popular mandate, and they have risen during the terms of presidents who presided over political and economic crises, abused their power, or engaged in unpopular wars." The homicide rate appears to correlate with Presidential approval ratings. If Roth is right, electing a bad President is dangerous and inciting people to hate any President, good or bad, could be deadly. But which is the cart, and which the horse? The Presidential approval rate might be a proxy for all sorts of measures of a well or poorly adjusted society. Or maybe there's another horse, somewhere, some third factor, that determines both the Presidential approval rate and the homicide rate. It's hard to say, partly because, in using quantitative methods to make an argument about the human condition, Roth has wandered into a no man's land between the social sciences and the humanities. After a while, arguments made in that no man's land tend to devolve into meaninglessness: good government is good, bad government is bad, and everything's better when everything's better. Correlating murder with a lack of faith and trust may contain its horror, but only because, in a bar graph, atrocity yields to banality.

Every September, the F.B.I. issues a report on crime, a compilation of statistics for the previous year. It does not offer an interpretation of this immense quantity of data. "We leave that up to the academics and the criminologists and the sociologists," an F.B.I. spokesman said, upon the release of this year's report. For all the number crunching, it's clear that there is no such thing as an average murder. Even if there were, what happened at the Petits' house in Cheshire, Connecticut, on July 23, 2007, wouldn't be it, and not just because of that crime's particular depravity. Much about the case is out of the ordinary. The victims were white and wealthy; murder victims are disproportionately black and poor. Exceptional, high-profile crimes often lead to legislative action driven by citizen initiative. California's controversial three-strikes law, a ballot measure, was proposed by a Fresno photographer whose daughter was murdered. Last year, after the Petit murders, the Connecticut legislature doubled and tripled mandatory penalties for second-

and third-time offenders. "Big cases make bad laws" is a criminological axiom, and one with which Mark A. R. Kleiman agrees, in "When Brute Force Fails: How to Have Less Crime and Less Punishment" (Current Affairs; $29.95). Kleiman blames big cases and bad laws for another distinctive feature of American life: 2.3 million people are currently behind bars in the United States. That works out to nearly one in every hundred adults, the highest rate anywhere in the world, and four times the world average. Prison crowding may have been one reason that Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky were paroled. Although the crime rate today is fifteen per cent lower than it was twenty-five years ago, the incarceration rate is four times as high. At what point, Kleiman wonders, will incarceration be a greater social ill than crime? He proposes, for lesser offenders, punishments that are swift and certain but not necessarily severe: a night in jail, instead of a warning, for missing a meeting with a parole officer, say, and ten nights the next time. Whether or not Kleiman's recommendations are practical, Connecticut, reeling from the Petit murders, is heading in the opposite direction.

The F.B.I. may leave the analysis of crime to academics, but, in the past few decades, the government has, increasingly, left the punishment of criminals up to public opinion. William Petit and his sister-in-law Johanna Petit-Chapman serve as the honorary co-chairs of Three Strikes Now, a grass-roots organization lobbying the state legislature to adopt California-style mandatory sentencing of life without the possibility of parole for third-time violent offenders. The Cheshire case has also dominated the state's death-penalty debate, a debate that, nationwide, has long centered on race. In Connecticut, whose population is eighty-four per cent white, six of the ten men on death row are black. (Both Hayes and Komisarjevsky are white.) Earlier this year, the Connecticut legislature voted to abolish the death penalty. William Petit publicly denounced the bill, and Jodi Rell, the state's governor, a Republican, vetoed it.

Capital punishment has been on the books in Connecticut since 1642. Three strikes has been tried before, too. In Colonial America, many crimes, including murder, were punishable by death and, for lesser crimes, Connecticut, like many colonies, mandated the death penalty for third-time offenders. That began to change on September 7, 1768, when a burglar named Isaac Frasier was hanged in Fairfield. Frasier had shown early evidence of a "thievish Disposition." "Men go from one degree of wickedness to another," the town's minister said in a sermon at the gallows titled "Excessive Wickedness, the Way to an untimely Death." Convicted of burglary in New Haven, Frasier was whipped and branded and had his ears cropped. Caught again in Fairfield in 1766, he received the same punishment "and was solemnly warned . . . that death would be his punishment on a third Conviction." When Frasier robbed another house, he was sentenced to death. "The Government of Connecticut have always been remarkably tender of putting persons to Death," one observer noted. But when Frasier applied to the legislature for clemency, he was denied. Said the pastor at the gallows, "Justice requires that you should suffer."

An outcry followed. Two weeks after Frasier's death, a Hartford newspaper published an essay called "An Answer to a very important Question, viz. Whether any community has a right to punish any species of theft with death?" The writer's answer—an emphatic no—borrowed extensively from Cesare Beccaria's treatise "On Crimes and Punishments," published in 1764. Beccaria, an Italian nobleman, argued against capital punishment—which was, at the time, widespread in Europe, too—on two grounds: first, in a republic men do not forfeit their lives to the government; and, second, capital punishment does not deter crime. Beccaria argued (and Kleiman has merely revisited that argument) that punishments, to be effective, must be swift and certain but not necessarily severe. Punishments, he insisted, should be proportionate to crimes, whose dangerousness could be measured, in "degrees," by their injury to society. For the crime of murder, Beccaria considered life in prison to be both more just and a more effective deterrent than execution.

The first American edition of Beccaria's treatise was published in 1777, and it reached a wide audience in Connecticut beginning in 1786, when it was serialized in a New Haven newspaper. "If we glance at the pages of history, we will find that laws, which surely are, or ought to be, compacts of free men, have been, for the most part, a mere tool for the passions of some," Beccaria wrote. This argument held particular appeal for a people who had just finished waging a war against the passions of King George; adopting Beccaria's recommendations came to seem, in a fundamental sense, American, as if the United States had a special role to play, as a republic, in the abolition of capital punishment. In 1784, the Yale senior class debated whether the death penalty was "too severe & rigorous in the United States for the present Stage of Society."

In the seventeen-nineties, five states abolished the death penalty for all crimes except murder. By the eighteen-twenties, all Northern states reserved capital punishment for first-degree murder. When incarceration replaced all corporal and most capital punishment, Americans built prisons, and sentenced criminals to jail time. In 1846, Michigan became the first state to abolish the death penalty. Twice, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the governor of Connecticut asked the state's legislature to do the same, to no avail.

In the course of the twentieth century, capital punishment was abolished in much of the world, including all of Western Europe, but not in the United States. Germany, Austria, and Italy stopped executing criminals after the Second World War. Beginning in the nineteen-fifties, other European countries began limiting capital punishment. Denmark abolished it entirely in 1978; the Netherlands, Australia, and New Zealand in the nineteen-eighties; Britain, Canada, and Belgium in the nineteen-nineties. In many parts of the United States, the death penalty was, if not outlawed, abandoned. Except for a serial murderer named Michael Ross, who was killed by lethal injection in 2005, after he waived his right to appeal because he wanted to die, no one has been executed in Connecticut, or anywhere else in New England, since 1960.

Not so elsewhere. Since 1976, more than a thousand people have been executed in the United States, a third of them in Texas. If Hayes and Komisarjevsky are found guilty and sentenced to death instead of life in prison without the possibility of parole, they will be killed by lethal injection. China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia execute more criminals, but, among affluent democracies, the death penalty, like the U.S. homicide and incarceration rates, marks an American exception, or, looked at another way, an anachronism.

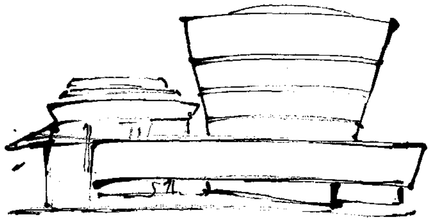
Long ago, Beccaria pointed out the meaningfulness of the correspondence, over time, between crime and punishment, between one kind of violence and another. If the history of murder contains a lesson, Beccaria believed, it was this: "The countries and times most notorious for severity of punishment have always been those in which the bloodiest and most inhumane of deeds were committed."

Murder has a history, but it isn't always edifying, and sometimes the history of crime and punishment has a chilling sameness. The prospect of death didn't deter Barnett Davenport, a Connecticut murderer who was hanged in 1780, at the age of nineteen. "No man becomes a devil in a minute," Davenport said, in a confession made a week before he mounted the gallows. His life of crime began when, at the age of twelve, he stole some watermelons from a neighbor's garden. More than once, he was caught. But by the time he was eighteen he had advanced from pilfering eggs and potatoes to stealing horses. He fought in the Revolution and then deserted. He went to live in the house of a man named Caleb Mallery, near Litchfield. On February 3, 1780, "a night big with uncommon horror" (and a year with an elevated homicide rate), Davenport killed Mallery, Mallery's wife, and their seven-year-old granddaughter, beating their heads in with a pestle and a rifle. Next, he pried open the family's money chest and took from it a pile of bills and a handful of coins. Then he set the house on fire, leaving inside two more children, ages six and four. He was captured, and swiftly hanged. In his confession, he recalled that Caleb Mallery had cried out, in between blows, "Tell me what you do it for!" History does not record the murderer's reply. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

In the Falling Snow, *by Caryl Phillips (Knopf; $25.95).* Phillips has written extensively, in fiction and nonfiction, about the legacy of the slave trade and the immigrant experience. His latest novel unfolds in a relentlessly overcast London, where an Englishman of West Indies descent finds himself in the grip of the proverbial "male forty-something panic." He's a failed husband—his two-decades-long marriage to a white woman recently ended, after he committed a single, joyless infidelity—and an ineffectual father to his troubled teen-age son. (Told that his son might be involved with a gang, he dismisses the idea as stereotyping of black youth.) As the story begins, he's engaged in a perfunctory affair with a much younger employee, who accuses him of harassment when he breaks things off. The uninflected prose is relieved only near the end, when the hero's dying father delivers an incandescent soliloquy worthy of a novel of its own.

Hell, *by Robert Olen Butler (Grove; $24).* Hatcher McCord is a news anchor with an unusual assignment: to ask Hell's tortured celebrity denizens, "Why do you think you're here?" In this compelling surrealist romp, McCord is chauffeured through Hell's sulfurous streets by Richard Nixon in Satan's own 1948 Cadillac. He encounters an often hilarious and bawdy but ultimately bleak metropolis that looks and sounds disturbingly familiar. His scoop is an interview with the Prince of Darkness himself, who wears Armani jeans, totes a Deerfield .44 Magnum, and is conversant in the language of psychotherapy. ("Everybody down here has father issues," he tells McCord.) McCord also has another agenda: to find an escape from his own personal hell. The answer, he realizes, lies in free will and the hard-won knowledge that life is "Hell for everyone. *We are all utterly alone, but we are alone together.*"



The Locust and the Bird, *by Hanan al-Shaykh, translated from the Arabic by Roger Allen (Pantheon; $24.95).* Al-Shaykh's poignant family history, narrated in the voice of her mother, Kamila, transports us to Beirut in the nineteen-thirties. At eleven, the beautiful and strong-willed Kamila is illiterate, her family penniless. She falls in love with the handsome Muhammad, but at fourteen is married off to an older man. "My husband had straddled me like I was a little donkey, and I'd bitten my own arm down to the bone," she says of her wedding night. Later, Kamila runs away with Muhammad, abandoning her daughters. Al-Shaykh writes in the prologue that this book is largely an attempt to come to terms with that decision. Through telling her mother's story, she learns to appreciate the sacrifices demanded of so many Arab women in their bid for freedom.

Too Big to Fail, *by Andrew Ross Sorkin (Viking; $32.95).* Sorkin, a business reporter and columnist for the *Times*, tells the story of how the financial crisis unfolded from the perspective of some of the giants of finance, who, seen close up, appear to be disconcertingly petty. Sorkin's analysis is fairly perfunctory (it doesn't go much beyond the "seeds of disaster" coming "together to create the perfect storm"), but his action scenes are intimate and engaging. Lehman's Richard Fuld is deluded to the point of derangement; John Thain, the head of Merrill Lynch, starts talking about compensation in the middle of a save-the-country meeting; Henry Paulson, the Treasury Secretary, twice becomes physically ill. Whenever things look bad, someone suggests calling Warren Buffett, whose role in the book is a bit like that of Charlie, at the other end of the Angels' speakerphone. Again and again, Buffett politely defers, until, finally, as he heads to a Dairy Queen with his grandchildren, he agrees to give Goldman Sachs five billion dollars.

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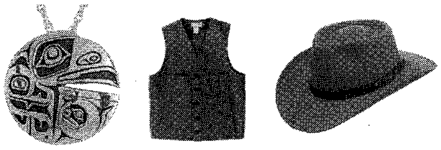

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MUSICAL EVENTS

PRIMAL SONG

Meredith Monk, at BAM.

BY ALEX ROSS

The family lineage of Meredith Monk—composer, singer, choreographer, filmmaker, theatre director, and maker of uncommon evenings—almost guaranteed that she would do something memorable in the course of her life. One of her great-grandfathers was the cantor of a Moscow synagogue; her maternal grandfather, the operatic bass-baritone Joseph Zellman, fled Tsarist Russia under suspicion of anarchist sympathies and went on to found a conservatory in Harlem; her mother, Audrey Marsh, was a professional pop singer in the golden age of radio, doing a stint as the Muriel cigar girl ("Why don't you pick me up and smoke me some time?"); and her father, Theodore Monk, ran a lumber business in the Bronx. She inherited a peculiarly American, typically New York story, mixing radical and capitalist urges, culture high and low, the spirit plane and the factory floor.

Monk arrived in Manhattan in 1964, during the heyday of the downtown avant-garde, when Cagean and Warholian provocateurs were laying siege to all the norms of art. Monk's feat was to bring wholeness, even a kind of epic breadth, to the deconstructive happenings of downtown. On one famous night in 1971, for "Vessel: An Opera Epic," she bused her performers and her audience to various locations around the city, conjuring the life and death of Joan of Arc. Her intricately planned spectacles awoke buried memories of primordial wailing, Neolithic rituals, Greek bacchanals, inscrutable medieval entertainments, and the folk songs of extinct peoples. More disturbingly, they prophesied the shattered culture of a post-apocalyptic future. Monk's many-sided art was rooted in her voice—a ruggedly beautiful, piercingly expressive, ever-changeable instrument, which cut to the core of emotion while largely bypassing language. She spoke of the "dancing voice," of a "voice as flexible as the spine." In passing moments, she could evoke an elderly sage, a wide-eyed child, a shaman, or a dying saint. To say that an artist defies categorization is a cliché, throat-clearing for a grant proposal. Monk created a more elemental confusion, to the point that critics in various genres had to negotiate among themselves over coverage of her work. The *Times* once dispatched a committee of music, dance, and theatre writers to assess her.

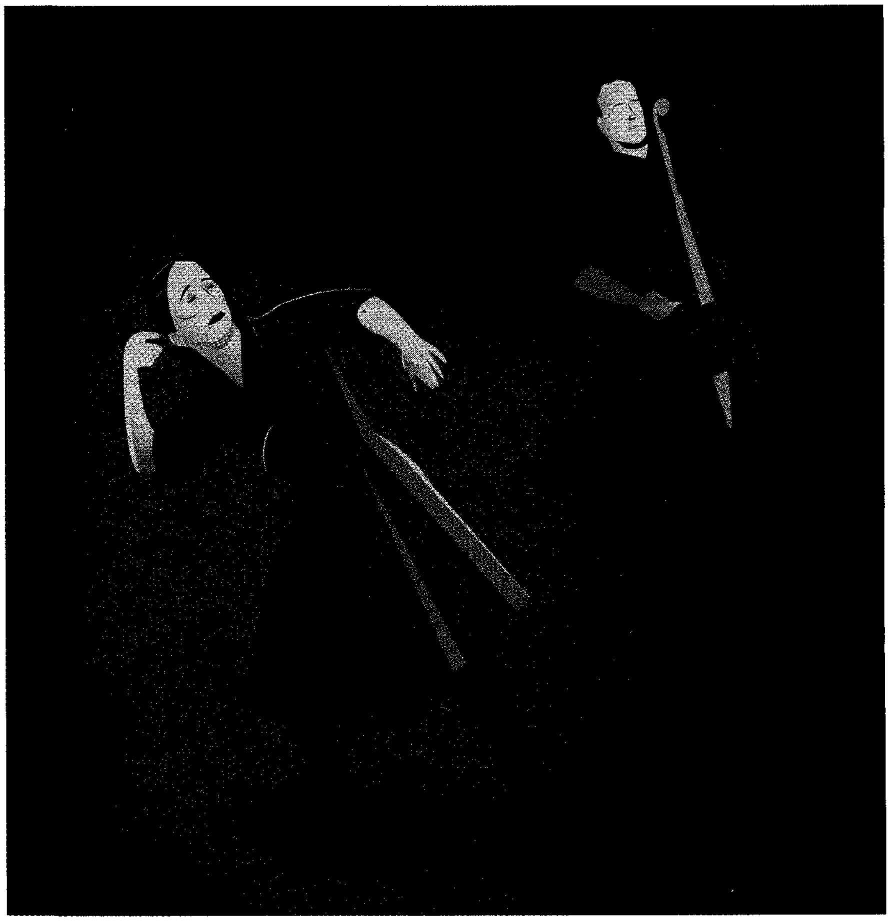
Last month, Monk presented her latest piece, "Songs of Ascension," at the Harvey Theatre, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. This time, the report appears in the music pages. Perhaps I'm biased, but music seems to have become Monk's true home. Since the late seventies, when she convened her own ensemble to perform "Dolmen Music," a hugely influential study in extended vocal techniques, she has increasingly positioned herself as a composer, relying on music to create contrapuntal effects that she formerly drew from the equal interaction of sound, image, and movement. Back in 1991, the Houston Grand Opera presented her opera "Atlas," and in 2003 the New World Symphony, under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas, introduced her first orchestral work, "Possible Sky," a freewheeling sonic fantasy. Her two most recent recordings for the German label ECM, "Mercy" and "Impermanence," have instruments dancing actively alongside voices. Perhaps most important, Monk no longer needs to be present for the execution of her music: the singers of M6, a group based in New York, have devoted themselves to learning and reinterpreting the Monk repertory.

If Monk is seeking a place in the classical firmament, classical music has much to learn from her. She conveys a fundamental humanity and humility that is rare in new-music circles. She is a brainy artist but never a cerebral one; she shapes her ideas to the grain of the voice and the contours of the body. For all the disparate elements that go into her work, she can't really be described as eclectic or interdisciplinary: her acts of fusion are too organic, too logical. She harks back to a time before disciplines existed and categories were set in stone. Richard Taruskin, in his monumental "Oxford History of Western Music," relates Monk to the very origins of the art form, the intermingling of oral and written practices in church music of the late Middle Ages. She represents a kind of reboot of tradition. She may loom ever larger as the new century unfolds, and later generations will envy those who got to see her live.

Monk turns sixty-seven this month. That's young for a composer but old for a singer. Her voice remains incomparable: the dancer-like flexibility, the microscopic control of pitch, and the pure, raw tone are all intact. Still, "Songs of Ascension," which she created with the video artist Ann Hamilton, seems a reflective, elegiac piece, conscious of passing time. Largely missing is the absurdist, almost Monty Pythonesque humor—the prancing about in animal costumes, the exuberant bursts of gibberish, the witty anachronisms—that Monk has unleashed many times in the past. (I love the moment, in the 1981 film "Ellis Island," when a group of late-nineteenth-century-looking immigrants are taught to say "vacuum cleaner.") Relatively little happens onstage in "Ascension": Monk and members of her ensemble saunter about in dark-red garb; form circles and break up; move up and down the aisles of the theatre; and converse musically with the Todd Reynolds String Quartet, the percussionist John Hollenbeck, and the clarinettist Bohdan Hilash (who plays other instruments as well). The production reminded me of Wagner's later definition of opera—once he got the *Gesamtkunstwerk* out of his system—as "deeds of music made visible."

The work begins, as Monk's works often do, with rough-hewn, folkish, almost singsong motifs, which sound as though they had been hollered on some uncharted steppe for a thousand years. The opening section culminates in a flat-toned, brusquely catchy chant of "Hey ya, hey ya, hey ya, hey ya," in a line that moves down the first four notes of the major scale and then repeats the final step. Soon, though, the voices are coalescing into thickly layered, warmly dissonant harmonies, not unlike something that you'd find in Ligeti or in the Stockhausen of "Stimmung." Intermittent string episodes combine neatly bustling lines with birdlike cries high in the violin—a precise instrumental echo of Monk's typical interplay with her singers. Rattlings of percussion hint at tribal ritual. Hamilton's video projections return obsessively to a single image of a galloping horse. We appear to be out on the open plain, before the railways came in.

At times, the music gets a little too becalmed, too ethereally attuned. But then a decisive shift occurs. In a movement tentatively entitled "Little Procession," Monk starts to sing brief, questing phrases, in irregular, ever-changing rhythms. The other singers accompany her not with their voices but with the plaintive whine of *shruti* boxes—Indian drone instruments that look like military briefcases and sound like harmoniums or accordions. This rapt, darkly gorgeous music feels like a summons, to which the rest of the ensemble responds: the strings pick up the counterpoint to Monk's phrases, the singers mimic the humming boxes. Reynolds, the lead violinist, launches into an extended improvisation in avian style, setting the stage for one last quartet movement and the grand finale.



In recent Monk compositions, instruments dance actively alongside voices.

PASCAL BLANCHET

Monk is an artist temperamentally averse to any kind of bombast, but in the final section, called "Procession," she indulges in a touch of Mahlerian show business: at BAM, several dozen additional singers—including members of the Stonewall Chorale and M6—appeared in the balcony to augment the swelling sound. Motifs from previous episodes are reworked and combined anew: the four-note descent of the "Hey ya" chant is reversed in the bass line and hypnotically repeated. Just when you think Monk is in danger of going over the top, the twilight mood returns. One by one, the principal performers lie down on their backs, still emitting sounds here and there, until silence takes over. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/ALEXROSS

Hear an excerpt from "Songs of Ascension" on Unquiet Thoughts, Alex Ross's new blog.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

MAKING PEACE

"The Men Who Stare at Goats" and "Precious."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Can the human mind be used as a weapon of war? It would be cheaper than a pilotless drone, for one thing, though not necessarily smarter. Those who wish to pursue this exciting possibility are advised to see "The Men Who Stare at Goats," which is based on a book by the British journalist Jon Ronson. What Ronson discovered, in his researches, was a section of the United States military that was solely and specifically tasked with mental combat. "More of this is true than you would believe," an opening title declares. What a tease.

Our Ronson-like protagonist is an American reporter named Bob Wilton (Ewan McGregor). He works in Ann Arbor, but craves a wider beat; the craving takes him to Iraq, or, at any rate, to a Kuwaiti hotel. There he meets Lyn Cassidy (George Clooney), who claims to be one of the Jedi Warriors, men who stared at goats until they—the goats, that is, not the men—fell down dead. ("What's a Jedi warrior?" Wilton asks. So *that's* why McGregor was hired: for the sake of an in-joke.) Staring was just one of the indispensable skills that were drilled into Cassidy and his comrades, years before, by Bill Django (Jeff Bridges), who vowed, "We must become the first superpower to develop super powers." Django was a ponytailed visionary—if that's not a tautology—who, following an epiphany in Vietnam, founded the New Earth Army, in order to establish whether love and peace can win wars. The answer is "They can't," but that didn't stop his recruits from trying to run through walls, or the government from sponsoring the program.

Most of these training sessions are viewed in flashback. The film's director, Grant Heslov, flips constantly between the Django regime and the recent situation in Iraq, as Cassidy—who says he has been reactivated—crosses the border, with Wilton in tow, on a mission too secret to be revealed. If Heslov and his screenwriter, Peter Straughan, prefer to linger on the early days of the unit, it's because that is where the action is, or was. Hence the quick, perfect scene in which an ambitious psychic named Hooper (Kevin Spacey) congratulates the happy couple at a wedding reception, and adds, "Sorry it doesn't work out between you two."

Ewan McGregor, Jeff Bridges, and George Clooney in Grant Heslov's movie.

PABLO LOBATO

At moments like this, the movie feels rich in satisfactions. To watch actors as nimble as Bridges, Clooney, and Spacey clashing wits as if they were lightsabers is precisely the kind of fun—grownup fun, delivered by men, not kids, and lit not by special effects but by a serious love of the joust—that I demand from Hollywood and, for the most part, no longer get. Each man vies to be the most deadpan, determined to present his character, a solemn clairvoyant fruitcake, as nuttier than the rest. Clooney is probably the winner here, even turning to McGregor and wielding the famous "sparkly eyes" technique, as taught to super-spies, without a smirk. The most handsome and capable star in the world, *and* he doesn't mind coming across as a total dork. It's not fair.

It's also not fair that the movie lets him down. Clooney gives it everything, but what does he get in return? A void where the story is meant to be. For a while, everything ambles along like a mashup of "Three Kings," the 1999 Clooney film about the first Gulf War, and the Three Stooges, with Heslov dishing out roof tumbles, car smashes, and cheek slaps. Much of this is neatly framed—an eye poke, for some reason, is funnier in long shot—and you sit there for an hour, in good humor, waiting for the narrative to stop noodling around and get going, only to realize, to your consternation, that it's winding down. In truth, there just isn't enough motion here to sustain a motion picture. The material is a gift: Considering the mileage that Robin Williams got out of "military intelligence" for his radio riffs in "Good Morning, Vietnam," you can imagine the glee with which he would have feasted on the news of psychic soldiering. As for Joseph Heller, it's only the thought that some targets are just too pitifully easy that might have restrained his hand. In both cases, however, the Jedis would surely have supplied no more than a telling subplot, or a skit. After all, it's not as if they ever *achieved* anything.

Late in the day, efforts are made to knock up a makeshift finale. In a covert facility in the desert, Wilton and

Cassidy, the logic of whose actions is roughly half of that allotted to Hope and Crosby in "Road to Morocco," stumble upon Django and other figures from the past. We get a communal acid trip—always a clear sign of a movie with nowhere to go—followed by pounding volleys of rock music, as a herd of goats, which have been shot at rather than merely stared at, are set free, together with a cluster of orange-suited enemy prisoners, who have been tortured. This sideways glance at a deeply uncomical and still potent issue is one hell of a misstep on Heslov's part. Having urged us to take nothing seriously throughout, how can he expect us to switch, for a couple of minutes, to a thoughtful and disapproving frown? What is this, "Road to Guantánamo"? Safely back in America, Wilton pledges to "tell everybody what happened." But that's the problem, Bob. Nothing did.

Please make sure, when you buy a ticket for "Precious: Based on the Novel 'Push' by Sapphire," to pronounce the title in full. I know you will. There was a plan to call it "Push," until another movie got there first. But why not call the new one "Precious," and leave it at that? After all, Deborah Kerr didn't star in "The Innocents: Based on the Novella 'The Turn of the Screw' by Henry James," and Dustin Hoffman didn't star in "Rain Man: Based on the Overwhelming Desire to Win an Academy Award by Dustin Hoffman," so why the change in rubric?

The heroine is Clareece Jones (Gabourey Sidibe), a Harlem teen-ager better known as Precious. She is grimly overweight, her face so filled out that the play of normal expression seems restricted; yet Sidibe does wonders with that sad limitation, and we learn to spot the flare of anger in her eyes. She has much to be angry about: aged sixteen, she already has one child, who has Down syndrome, and is carrying another. The father is her own father, who later turns out to be H.I.V. positive. We are forced to watch as she is violated in livid closeup, complete with squeaking bedsprings, a belt being unbuckled above a sweating belly, and—lest the seething aggression of the rape escape us—a shot of eggs sizzling in grease. If the subject were not so grave, you would be tempted to laugh at this desperate overkill of detail. Does the director, Lee Daniels, not realize how such industrial-strength images tend to weaken, rather than fortify, the moral case?

Expelled for being pregnant, Precious seeks alternative schooling at Each One Teach One, a local program for those undesired elsewhere. Her classmates, especially Jo Ann (Xosha Roquemore), whose favorite color is "fluorescent beige," and Rhonda (Chyna Layne), with her fabulously broad Jamaican accent, are the most naturally uplifting people in the film—far more so than their teacher, Blu Rain (Paula Patton), whose powers of uplift feel like make-believe. She is a vision of tolerant gentleness, who wears a new set of soft fabrics every day and plays Scrabble in the evening with her equally lovely lesbian partner. "They talk like TV stations I don't watch," Precious says, but that tart line is not borne out by the film, which drinks in Ms. Rain without demur. The same goes for the fantasy sequences—hugely ill-advised dream clips, showing a richly clad Precious at a movie première or slow-dancing with a hunk. One of them even finds a slender white girl gazing back at her from the bedroom mirror. What we have here is a fouled-up fairy tale of oppression and empowerment, and it's hard not to be ensnared by its mixture of rank maleficence and easy reverie. The gap between being genuinely stirred and having your arm twisted, however, is narrower than we care to admit.

What rescues "Precious" is the performance of Mo'Nique as Mary, the heroine's Medusa-like mother. Given her range of leisure interests—smoking, cursing, channel surfing, baby tossing, munching pigs' feet, and throwing televisions down the stairs—there is no reason that the character should be more than a vicious cartoon. But Mo'Nique gives tremendous life to this dead soul, makes you wonder where her own misery sprouted from, and closes the proceedings with a monologue of selfishness so storm-driven that for a second, despite ourselves, we are almost swept away. Sitting opposite during this tempest is a social worker, Mrs. Weiss (Mariah Carey). Hold on: a stern, song-free, compassionate piece of acting from Mariah Carey? That sounds like one of Precious's fantasies, but it's for real. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/FRONTROW
Richard Brody blogs daily about movies.

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Gahan Wilson, must be received by Sunday, November 8th. The finalists in the October 26th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 23rd issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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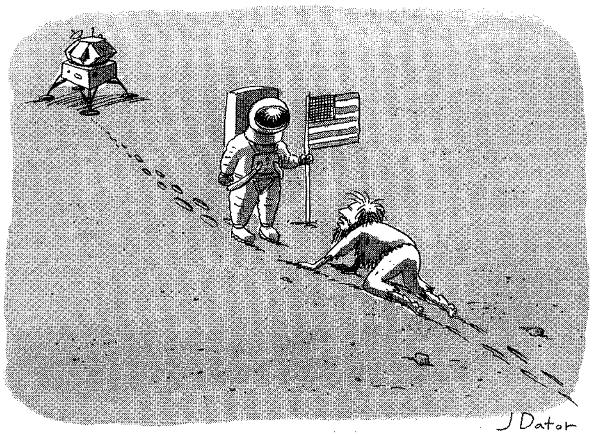
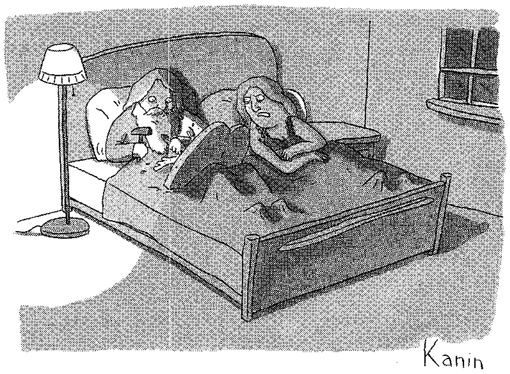


"One of us is in the wrong movie."
Michael Jerald, Brattleboro, Vt.



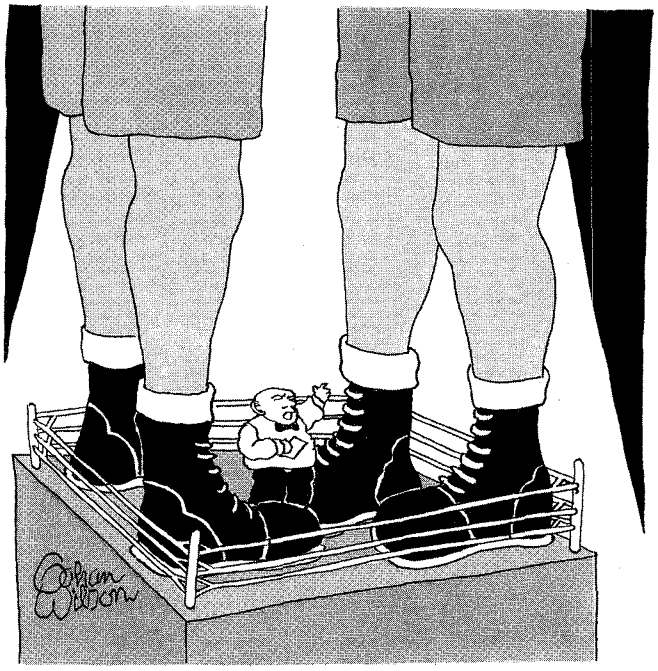
THE FINALISTS

"It needs a feisty female detective."
Lee Neville, Niagara Falls, N.Y.

"They ignored your first ten. What makes you think you'll do any better with these?"
Bob Silverstein, Scarsdale, N.Y.

"Dear . . . diary . . . She's . . . finally . . . asleep. . . . Oops."
William DiDio, White Plains, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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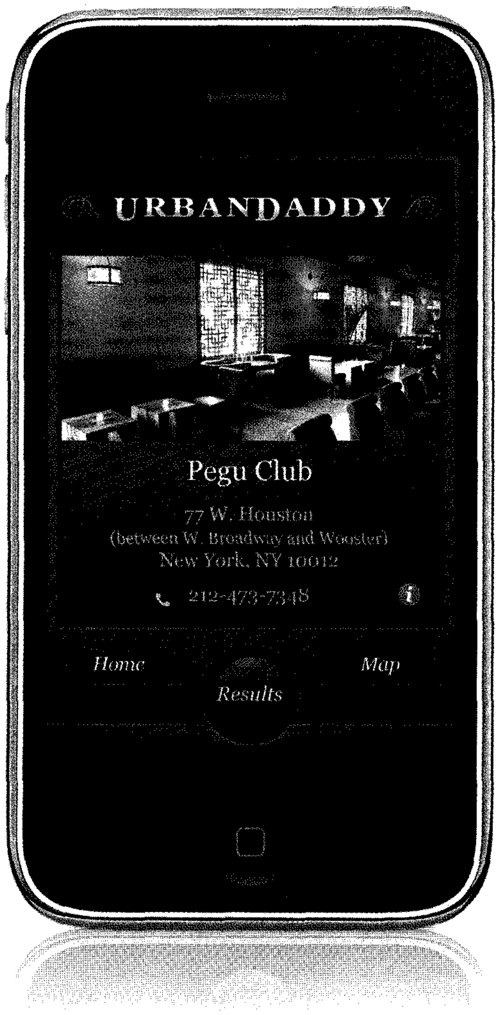

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